# Social Formation in Medieval Bengal

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*To the memory of*

Dr. Pramatha Nath Banerjee

Prof. Makhan Lal Roychowdhuri

Dr. Muhammad Rafiq Shibli

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# PREFACE

This work took its initial shape as a Ph. D. dissertation and derives basically its present form from part of a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Calcutta. It was conceived in a very elementary form when I was a graduate student at the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University (U.S.A), in mid-sixties. I would not like to call the work just an exercise in 'specialization' in medieval history – in attitude, approach and training, I have failed to become a professional 'History person' in modern and technical sense. I would like to consider my 'subject' a part of Humanities rather than of Social Science.

I was a little girl at the time of Great Calcutta Killings, Partition and Indian independence. On a late April morning (1947) me and my brother were standing on the balcony of our house looking out to the street in front. We eye-witnessed a gruesome killing – an old local tailor being beaten up, killed and dragged to be drowned in the nearby Ganges by some neighborhood goons. We dared not divulge the agonizing secret to the elders, but a domestic attendant later told us that the poorman had been killed because he was an 'enemy' This traumatic childhood memory, later with many other factors, drove me to a personal quest to the roots of the history of interaction between the two major communities

of the sub-continent. At a growing age my world of History was influenced by three people : my late father Dr. Pramatha Nath Banerjee, Professor of History and Law, Dr. M. L. Roychowdhuri of the Department of Islamic History and Culture, both of Calcutta University and my language teacher Dr. Muhammad Rafiq Shibli of R. K. Mission Institute of Culture, who gave me lessons in Urdu, Persian and History of Islam. All three of them, with great intellectual capability and academic excellence, never believed that Hindu-Muslim divide was embedded in the historical logic of India. My personal, familial, social and academic experience lead me to be convinced that religious loyalties do not take precedence over common points of association and bonds of relationship based on tangible intersocial ties. On the other hand, historically cultural exchanges and shared material interests are far more viable factors in inter - community relations. But whatever the personal experiences and influences are, in selection of data and presentation of facts, I hope my perception has not been clouded by any bias. On the basis of existing data, I believe, one can safely trace the growth and strength of a composite society in medieval Bengal which sustained for centuries, may be with some periods of trials and tribulations, but without marked fanaticism, based on religion alone. A deeper look into the social-economic condition in the period of study reveal that a clear-cut dividing line between the 'Hindus' and the 'Muslims' was not present, and there was a large overlap in their social customs, religious practices and belief. The perception and the process needed a macro study to place the period in a larger context, at the same time pointing to its special features and reasons behind the specialities.

Many vital areas remained uncovered, not because their signifiacnce was overlooked, but because they are more perceptively and professionally dealt elsewhere. I am entirely responsible for the content and perception of the work, any error of fact, style, failure to acknowledge adequately, are totally unintended.I have not intentionally used diacritical marks which tend to be incorrect without specialized printing. I have been moved over and again to rethink, from different angles, by the works of Prof. Irfan Habib and Prof. Brajadulal Chattopadhyay. Anybody who works on the history of medieval Bengal is bound to be indebted to the classical works of late Dr. M. R. Rahman. I do not have anything

new to say, if the main arguments of the book lead to some rethinking and closer scrutiny by students and young scholars of the extant historical data questioning ruling orthodoxies about historical processes, it will be enormously gratifying.

First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to my family for much treasured emotional support in whatever I do. Amar, my husband,is my severest critic, but it should be gracefully admitted here that with his exceptionally logical mind and wide range of reading, I have always benefitted from his criticism. My daughter Tisha and son-in-law Dipankar Banerjee (Belgium), son Kaushik and daughter-in-law Sakina Sadat (USA) are not only my friends but guardians too, who always insist that I pursue academic work seriously. My niece Ishanee Mukherjee, a scholar and teacher of History, took regular interest in the work. My eldest brother Dr. Purnendu Kumar Banerjee (Geneva), a scholar and diplomat, encouraged me and offered assistance to prepare the text. My third brother, poet and scholar Prof. Ron. D. K. Banerjee (USA), main witness of the tragedy, has lovingly allowed me to use his poem 'Calcutta 1947.' Dr. Aniruddha Ray, Dr. Ratnabali Chatterjee, Prof. Qamruddin, Dr. Ranjit Sen of the Department of Islamic History and Culture, Calcutta University, encouraged me to publish the work, I thank them sincerely. Sri Alok Ghosh of the Department of History, Kalyani University and Executive Editor, 'Aitihasik' finally convinced me to publish the work from 'Bibhasa', I am grateful to him and his team.

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## Calcutta 1947

A late April day
and ordinary.
I was standing
in the third story blacony,
my body bent
over the grip of my hands
on the cool railing

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

A late April day
and ordinary.
He was walking slowly
past the angle
of my appraisal
slowly,
when a voice from the opposite house
shouted something.
And he ran,
tugging his body in queer jerks,
his doll's bones
seeming to rattle.
But not far. He fell down
gasping,
even before they had forked out
of the narrow lanes,
with sticks and clubs,
iron rods
torn from the Children's Park.

I seem to remember
That he had crawled a little,
as if towards an invisible
lair.

in the heat's white belly.

Then they had tied
a straw rope round his thin ankles
and dragged him to the Ganges,
to bloat with water.

Later,
having seen other bodies
great with heat,
I understood that he had belonged
to the enemy –
an offering to the pitiless
April noon.

***R.D. K. Banerjee***
(excerpts from
*A View from the Balcony* : Calcutta -1947)

# Introduction

In case of Bengal in the medieval period the knowledge transmitted contain some serious literature gaps - economic history has not been given due attention and social history has not been considered in relation to economic history. Excellent works have been done in building up political history on numismatic, epigraphic and other sources. Literary source, which is very rich in vernacular, has been exploited by scholars of Bengali language and literature to get glimpses of social life from the 16th century onwards. In modern historiography there is a serious contradiction in the attention of the scholars divided between macro study and micro study - interpretation in a larger perspective and space, and collection and use of detailed data in a limited space. The vast expansion of the sub-continent require a huge range of information and large perspective to consider the socio-economic history in totality; on the other hand, given the situation of geographical, traditional, ethnic and cultural variety of the sub-continent, one has to consider and accept the significance of regional dimension of history. For accumulation of detailed informations in vernacular languages to build up regional history is being given due attention by modern scholars. But compartmentalization of historical data in a limited framework has its own constraints - it is always difficult to decide whether to make addition to already existing store of data or to go for further interpretation. Unfortunately economic history of the Sultanate and Mughal periods in Bengal remained peripheral in Indian historiography compared to other

regions like Punjab, Sindh, Rajasthan, Gujrat, M.P U.P. and the power centre, Delhi. In the last two decades or so highly commendable research has been done in the economic history of South India. But in case of Bengal in the post-13th century period, till the colonial history began, political history claim disproportionately large share of attention; some economic organizations have got consideration, to a certain extent, as a part of administrative history. But there is almost no general work done about the nature of change in the prevailing socio-economic structure, and in the period of transition the dynamics of change. The movement of one period to the other consists of changes within a broad framework of continuity in the socio-economic life of the people - this aspect can only be touched upon by a relative study of both the previous period and the period of research.

Another disastrous aspect in Bengal's historiography is the stark political reality that it has been partitioned twice on the basis of 'religion'. This has created such an impact on the scholars of its history, specially on the older generation close or contemporary to the final partition, that in most of the works, the main point of reference is what is termed as 'Hindu-Muslim relation', ignoring the social context and economic level of the people of the region in the past. Some believe that from the beginning of Turkish occupation to its end, it was a long history of fanaticism, bloodshed, oppression and torture of Hindus, examples being forcible conversion, iconoclasm and humiliation inflicted by a subservient position in the society. Some others are of opinion that Turkish rule throughout was a golden period of Bengal's history, examples being liberalism of Turkish Sultans towards non-believers, universal piety of Sufis,voluntary conversion accepted to escape caste-oppression and silence or denial of destruction of temples and idols. They describe the society by a bi-cameral concept in which it is considered to be strictly compartmentalized into two watertight chambers on the basis of 'the twain shall never meet' idea. There are others who accept the notion of parallel society, who believe in 'the Great Divide' that it is necessary to study each of these communities separately and differently. Some focus their attention more on the syncretic elements in vernacular literature, Bhakti-movement, Sufism, architecture, music and painting. They do not try to explain the socio-cultural aspects of syncretism in the light of economic realities. So

it has become an acute historiographical problem to delve into the existing data to select them, to use them for social formations starting with the coming of the Tuskish tribes into the Delta, where there were more vital areas to identify than 'Hindu-Muslim' difference.

Chronology of political history to start and end as a span of time is generally an accepted norm, which in the present work starts in the 13th century and ends in the first half of the 16th century which approximately corresponds with the Turkish conquest of Bengal <1204> to the fall of the independent Sultanate <1538>. This has been accepted as a point of reference to three centuries of Bengal's history to indicate the time frame of the present enquiry.

Identification of important and new developments in significantly large and unified area justifies the demarcation of the physical/geopolitical extent of Bengal in the period under review. After the establishment of Turkish military power, its political frontier was gradually extended as the early conquerors and their alter successors won over and entrenched into centres of economic interests. Early Turkish administrators and soldiers were generally concentrated in garrisons and settlements located in or near pre-conquest urban centres, through the control of which they could acquire hold over agriculturally rich hinterland which immediately extended the revenue yielding network to the benefit of the new regime. Surrounded in the north and eastern side by mountains and hills, and to the south by the sea, Bengal was the terminus of Turkish conquest and migration which finally led to the expansion of its socio-cultural frontier from Panchagaur to Varendra, Rahr, Samatata, Pundrabardhan and Banga to the three large iqtas of Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon of the early Turkish rulers to the gradual emergence of a relatively united 'Bangalah' in the Sultanate period which proceeded to 'Subah Bangla' of the Mughals and finally 'Banghella'/'Bengala' of the Portuguese reaching 'Bengal' of the British - it is a long historically traceable physical and cultural frontier. Bengal, consisting larger part of eastern India at some points of history, is an important region in Indian historiography, as from a very early period it followed an autonomous line of political development, an area ethnically homogenous and geographically contiguous.

The relevence of the study of socio-economic backdrop to the Turkish conquest of Bengal is unquestioned. To understand the changes which

came through the Turkish occupation, and also the continuity of the trends from pre-Turkish period it is necessary to recapture the basic economic aspects of the Sena state. At first Bakhtiyar Khalji's conquest was limited to Rahr area only. The defeated Sena rulers continued to rule from East Bengal for next hundred years nearly. Even in the Rahr region Satgaon was conquered by the Turkish arms only in 1298 AD. Throughout the 13th century parallel powers were holding on to different areas independent of the Turkish occupied regions. In Bengal's historiography, till recent times, the 13th century has remained a 'twilight zone'. Recently scholars dealing with Indian history prior to the 13th century have started discussing about the decay of urban centres and decline in overseas trade before the mid-11th century. Prof. R.S. Sharma put forward this view where absence of precious metal coins and decline of overseas commerce are held as evidences of urban decay. The same model was accepted by Prof. Nihar Ranjan Ray in his classical work on History of the Bengalees in pre-Turkish conquest times. Dr. M.R. Tarafdar and Dr. V.K. Thakur showed evidences of economic decline in Bengal almost upto the end of the 13th century. Dr. B.N. Mukherjee opposed this opinion by showing further evidences of overseas trade and presence of some kind of medium of exchange in Chatgaon area, specially in Harikela, supported by the accounts of the early medieval Arab geographers and numismatic evidences. Prof. Barrie Morrison showed regional variation in economic condition, concentrating on the special situation in the Samatata area. In the present work more emphasis has been given to land system, particularly evident in the copperplate landgrant documents of the 13th century. The main trends of this land system, its gradual evolution into a new form of exploitation of the rural class, was continued in the next period which was supplanted to a certain extent by a fresh one for the benefit of the new foreign ruling class.

Consolidation of political power in the pacified areas gradually leading to its indegenization started early in Turkish state formation. The first hundred and fifty years of occupation was replete with internecine conflict and clan rivalry for power capture between the walis and iqtadars. The governors, often than not, rebelled against the Delhi Sultanate to assert their right of autonomy. Although they, more or less, followed the administrative model of the Delhi Sultans, their assertion of independence

was crushed by invasions from Delhi, till the middle of the 14th century when Firuz Shah Tughloq led two expeditions <1353 and 1358> during the reigns of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah and his son Sikandar Shah. That Bengal, as early as in the 14th century, politically contended the Delhi Sultans as an unified and territorially integrated administrative unit could be obvious from the titles 'Shah-i-Bangala' and 'Shah-i-Bangaliyan' given by historian Afif to the independent Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah. In the stateformation in Sultanate Bengal ideology was separated from reality; although Perso-Islamic concepts of legitimacy expressed through instruments like khutbah, sikka and titles, factors arising out of the conquest of territory and pacification of people who had inherited very different political and cultural traditions, had to be considered carefully by Bengal Sultans. Although they maintained distance from Delhi, they still remained within the frame work of Islamic ideology. Some of them deliberately pursued independent relationship with the caliphs of Islam; at the same time, some even declared themselves caliphs in their coins and inscriptions. But finally, the Islamic titles, institutions, ideology and concepts - all led towards political independence from Delhi and formed a state under hereditary and indegenized monarchal system which accomodated and adjusted itself to the local more.

The economic consequence of the Turkish conquests and the resultant establishment of the independent Bengal Sultanate for two hundred years is a highly significant chapter in Indian history. The forces of economic change, the levers of change and the principal characteristics of a transforming economy need careful reviewing. Occupation of territories and transformation of land system led inevitably to regrouping of the different sections of the society. The old Hindu rural aristocracy consisting of different types of territorial cheiftains lost their semi-independent status of local rulers with the introduction of vassalage system based on tribute and armed assistance to the new conquerers. These pre-Turkish conquest local landlords turned into tax-collectors of the government, finally yielding place to a new class of landholders. Islam gradually, spread to the rural areas through ghazis and sufis who initially came into conflict with the local bhuians/bhoumiks. Some kind of compromise was reached on land when colonization started and foundation of local Muslim settlements were laid. With the inception of the independent sultanate tributary areas

were transferred to jagirland and regular collection of land revenue necessitated Turkish government to appoint large number of officers and revenue collectors better acquainted with local custom in rural areas. Here is noticeable the emergence of non-brahmin Hindu groups, particularly the kayasthas, traditionally conversant with revenue matters, acting as an intermediary section between the Turkish government and rural agricultural communities. Initially brahmin groups were antagonistic towards 'mlechha' rule, but later many of them accepted service and patronization of the Turkish government. Due to 'yavana' contact the lost prestige and caste status in their society was largely recovered by joining Gaudiya reform movement led by Sri Chaitanya. Not only due to the advent of the Turkish rule, but also by its own inner dynamics, Hindu social groups were being reformed within their caste-folds. Gaudiya reform movement received support from baniks and artisans as well; lower status groups were also accepted, theoretically and practically, by some Vaishnav leaders. Spread of Islam changed the face of rural Bengal to a large extent and in the urban centres the impact of change was felt among the artisan groups and service sector.

Terming the two communities simply as 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' creates complicated problems in the analysis of social context and economic levels of innumerable groups which composed the society. Social divisiveness did not result from difference of religions only. Muslims, like the Hindus, were not a homogenous community. From the very start of their settlement, they were divided into different ethnic groups - Uzbeg, Khalji, Karakhitai, Qipchak, Pathan, Abyssinian, etc., etc., who had strong clan allegiance and difference in between which could not be cemented so easily by commonality of religious belief only. The plurality of the system has specially been proved in the political history of Bengal where a long period of almost hundred and fifty years was plunged into chaos and confusion created by rivalry, conspiracy and infighting among Muslim ruling groups belonging to different Central Asian and Afghan tribes. It took quite some time for the nobility to take an institutional form in this system. Later on, higher status Muslim groups in the ruling class were composed of the Arabs, Persians, Abyssinians, Afghans, and last of all; the Mughals. The foreign colonized nobility followed the imperial style of the Sultans by inbibing high sounding titles, patronization to cultural and religious

institutions, and a lavish life style. They jealously guarded their separate cultural identity. But it has already been noticed that the institution of the nobility could not be monopolized by the colonized Muslims only the ulama through the canon law and other court duties, were not directly involved in proselytization. But qazis and mollahs at the local level, sharing same orthodoxy with the ulama and sufi elites of foreign origin had a lot of difference with the converted local pirs and mendicants. But finally, with the indegenization of the Turkish state and society the nobility turned into a composite institution.

Land system and revenue organizations were the most important elements of economic life. Land was clearly categorized in pre-Turkish Bengal by its physical and social characteristics. Land under Turkish system was also divided into types, but according to its revenue characteristics : iqta/jagir/khalisa/idrar, etc.. Turkish state was the principal appropriator of agricultural surplus from rural areas. Multiple duties of muqtis included revenue collection, supply of soldiers to the immediate political authority and other administrative responsibilities. Iqta system was introduced in Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji, although he himself was not exactly an iqtadar of Delhi. He appointed three of his captains as muqti. After his assassination almost civil war situation prevailed under the Khalji Maliks <1206-1226> and the occupied area went into the hands of the early sultans of Delhi. During this time after his death important associates of Bakhtiyar Khalji accepted assignments as muqtis of Delhi Sultans. But even at this time Minhaj describes Lakhnauti as an independent region and not a dependent province of Delhi. Despite the sporadic rebellions of the muqtis, effective control was kept on Bengal by Iltutmish, Balban and the Khaljis. The rule of the Balbanis under hereditary governors served as a prelude to dynastic monarchy. Next Ghyasuddin Tughloq conquered Lakhnauti and divided the whole Turkish occupied area into three major iqtas : Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon. With the foundation of the independent Sultanate the jurisdiction over large autonomous principalities changed into more fragmented and smaller jagir areas. From this period emerged a hierarchical pattern in landed class generically divided into groups such as jagirdars, zamindars, etc. The term jagirdar has been used in different sources in reference to Bengal.As metallic currency was in restricted circulation and the number of nobles

were increasing over the years. payment could be conveniently made through jagirs. At the end of the period Nizamuddin's comments about Nasib Shah's bestowing jagirs to fleeing Afghan nobles has created controversy. Even in the early period of Turkish rule in India there is reference to zamindari, which did not imply ownership of land, but certain rights over agricultural produces. Kharaj was imposed on the peasantry which reached the government as revenue through different agencies which created a class of intermediaries between the state and the cultivators, and zamindar was one such. Often zamindars were representatives of local administrators in the villages; police administration and revenue collection were the two rights inherent in the institution. There are several mentions in the sources, from the early 15th century onwards, where the word 'zamindar' has been categorically mentioned. In the early 16th century a system of revenue collection termed as ijaradari/majmu'adari is evident in the sources. It was a contract/muqata'a <Arabic>/'mokta' in Bengali, for lease/ijara between the government and the collector for collection of revenue of particular area on fixed amount in cash payable annually to the government. Both the Hindu ijaradars and the Portuguese acquired and enjoyed this right in Bengal at the end of the Hussain Shahi period. Khalisa was fixed for special purpose and the rest of the land for general purpose was distributed as jagir. Revenue from khalisa was collected directly by government officers on behalf of Sultans and not by any intermediaries; the process by which an area was brought under khalisa was termed as 'khas'. It appears from the sources that more land was being brought under khalisa in the Hussain Shahi period. Inamland was granted to the theological class which created a new class of landed sufis as a distinct social group. Subsidies were granted to those associated with religious institutions for their loyalty and support to the political authority. Individual sufis, who might be potentially dangerous from doctrinal stand point, were dependent on the state by granting land and other subsidies. Thus in a later period madad-i-ma'ash rights were hereditized and either la-kharaj land or right of collection of revenue was given to the families of renowned sufis and pirs.

Classical Islamic taxation system was not always practical to apply in a newly conquered territory. Initially Khalji Amirs and Maliks had to depend on ghanima both for their own maintenance and for sending to

Delhi. With the growth of vasalage system tribute was received from the Hindu chieftains in a more regular form. Thus money collected from tribute and cash and kind collected from plunder were spent on the maintenance of the early ruling class and the army and a large part of it was transmitted to Delhi Sultans. By the time Bengal became independent, large tributary areas were transferred into iqtas, from the 14th century onwards an organized revenue system could develop. Kharaj was the main source of revenue for the government. Originally the notion of kharaj as a tax on all peasants, comprising the surplus, irrespective of the faith of the tax payers, came to be propagated by Hanafi jurists. Due to lack of direct revenue records it is difficult to assess the rate of collection of kharaj in Bengal. Different sources give different rates from half of the produce to one-fifth of it; there are mentions of extra/irregular/unlawful/ un-Islamic taxes in the sources. Also there are references to taxes in cash and kind and its exemption in special circumstances. Rigorous methods of collection of taxes are evident in the literary sources. Collection of revenue was mostly in the hands of the Hindu officers and intermediaries under the Sultanate. Different designations of government revenue officials are available in the sources from sar-i-gumushta to dihidar in a village. There are mentions of crop sharing, weights and land measurement in the vernacular literature. There are also references to zakat and other local taxes like ghati, dani, hatkar, ghatkar etc. In the Hussain Shahi period the most important source of revenue after kharaj was customs duties which later the Portuguese enjoyed as revenue farmers in port areas.

In recent researches R.S. Sharma and others have characterized the period between 600-1200 AD as a distinct phase of feudal formation in which feudal mode of production as a conceptual base has been used to identify and explain important social and cultural developments in Indian history. Early medieval social formation was based on predominantly agricultural economy where the rural society was dominated by a class of landlords who collected rent from peasants claiming right on ownerhsip of land. As a result there grew a subject peasantry who actually possessed the land, but were compelled to pay rent in cash/kind/labour to the landlords. There was another factor - the growth of serf-peasants who were attached to the soil, but did not own it, as they could only own cattle, seed and implements. There are for and against groups among the

modern historians on feudal formation in Indian history.

After the foundation of Turkish state the change revolved round the question of extraction of surplus from the producers and its distribution among the ruling class, including the intermediaries. The new situation necessitated to create a system of extracting the surplus, for more effective collection and distribution for best appropriation of the new ruling class. Prof. Muhammad Habib's postulation of the term 'revolution' has been modified by Prof. Irfan Habib whose perception is that the Sultanate created a new system of agrarian exploitation with a parasitical urban growth based upon it. He designates the economic organization established under the Sultanate neither feudal, nor capitalistic not even transitional, but 'medieval Indian system'. Prof. Irfan Habib raised vital questions regarding the status of peasantry in this economic system. The peasant as 'praja' emerged as subject peasantry who faced oppression in the form of rigorous collection of revenue. But, however meagre the information in official sources about the real situation faced by the cultivators, the central idea in the mention of revenue collection revolved round the problems generated by intermediaries, government officials and other collectors, the actual presence of the peasant is marginal in this scenario. However partial the accounts, we still get informations from official sources about division of land as revenue units, revenue organizations, mechanism and rate of collection of land tax, weights and measures, jarib system, and particularly, detailed account of rights and duties, or lack of it, of different categories of revenue collectors in the economic structure.

In official structure the peasant is reflected as a primary producer whose sole duty was to act as a tax payer, the human content of his existence is no part of it; he is not considered as a social being, as one of the innumerable toiling masses in a very old agrarian society. Recently some attention has been devoted to the social framework of agriculture. Here, in this respect we may think about other sources of information. In the rich medieval Bengali literature we have the rare opportunity of getting a glimpse of the life and living of ordinary people, specially that of the peasantry. In this literature, through gods and goddesses, saints and sages, pirs and paighambars, the life of common man has been depicted symbolically, ideally, and also realistically. Actually, almost all of them, despite their divinely attributes, are the true representatives of an old

agrarian culture. Use of literature as source of history is a highly controversial area, the two major problems being the determination of time and differentiation between the ideal and the real. In a old system, to follow a thematic approach may solve certain problems particularly about peasant life and agriculture. Folklore, as a source of oral history, which is fast becoming a formally acceptable technique, may throw some light to the unknown areas, belonging inevitably to the lowest rung of the social ladder. The first and foremost query which arises here is the definition of 'peasant'; in this question D.D. Kosambi was the first historian to observe an irresistable co-relation between peasant economy and caste structure. In post-1200 period castes continued to proliferate in the society. So it is a relevent point to make about the social status of peasant in the jati-varna structure. Peasants acquired some social status in the caste-ridden Indian society through Bhakti movement which created a congenial atmosphere of vertical mobility. In the Gaudiya Vaishnav reform movement peasants are not particularly included initially, but through post-Chaitanya Sahajiya cults, influenced by Sufi mysticism, the ideas of protest percolated deep down in the society and reached the primary producers in a large scale. In vernacular literature we get scattered informations about the methods and process of cultivation, agricultural implements used, names of crops and produces, methods and containers used for preservation of grains, even insectiside and pesticide. Proverbs and sayings of Dak and Khana, Chashpalas and Krishaker Baromasis are storehouses of information about agriculture and agrarian life. Last but not the least, in the historiography of Islamization of Bengal few attempts have been made to explain how and when the majority of peasant population specially in the eastern part of the Delta, emerged as a Muslim community. The two inter-related themes of agrarian growth and Islamization as the effects of various forces including a long-drawn process of acculturation, achieved between the 13th and 16th centuries, need to be reviewed carefully. Recently Prof. Eaton has made a commendable effort towards it. According to him the emergence of folk Islam, with highly syncretic overtones in the special context of rural Bengal,became locally understood as the 'religion of the plough.'

In Bengal significant changes were reflected in the economy due to the Islamization of the polity, of qualitative change in the surplus from

largely an agriculture dependent economy of the pre-Turkish period to the inclusion of international trade surplus in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is evident from several factors like increase in the volume of overseas trade, a stable and continuous metallic currency, growth in craft production and progress in urbanization. From the initial period of Turkish occupation trade and commercial activities were promoted by conscious royal policy through conquests, minting of coins, patronization of traders and merchants and promoting urban production centres. Some of the early Turkish rulers built roads for communication links and long embankments invulnerable to floods to protect roads and surrounding areas from inundation. Some of them laid the foundation of a large scale flotilla. Hussain Shah built a bridge to connect Tribeni-Saptagram, to link up the twin cities. From the 15th century the ruling class participated in trading activities and acquired and possessed ships. Trade and commercial activities presupposed a certain extent of centralized control over agencies of communication and transportation. In the mean time, an elementary banking system, indispensable for urban economy, was growing among the mahajan groups, the tradition coming down from the shreshthis of the pre-13th century period. As Prof Habib points out effective commercialization of economy is usually preceeded by improvement in technical skill to proliferate craft manufacturing and large-scale concentration of artisans and craftsmen in urban centres. Large number of Hindu artisans were found in towns under Turkish rule, specially in building industry. It was mainly in the textile industries and royal karkhanas that converted Muslim artisans were engaged. Muslim artisans formed a large part of Bengal's urban proletariat. Theirs' organizations divided into separate groups, with distinctive occupations, paralleled the caste structure of contemporary Hindu society. It is more likely that they were initially from among the Hindu artisans of the same occupational groups or from former agriculturists or unskilled labourers responding to increasing labour demand of an expanding urban economy. Converted Muslim population was created out of enslavement of a large number of local people on the way to conquest and occupation. Slaves acquired through conquests raids, plunder and 'khidmati' were employed in industrial activities. There were slave markets all over India including Bengal. In case of Bengal, there are frequent mentions of domestic slavery. Slave turned artisans were absorped partially in production system.

They were sometimes employed by mystics and non-commercial masters, specially for weaving. There is enough proof that there was a substantial growth of the artisan class in the Sultanate period in Bengal. From the 15th century, Hindu masons and craftsmen, the slave labour, along with free labour, added substantially to the growth of urban economic activities. Large scale building activities and expansion of textile industry in cities created employment for labour force, both Hindu and Muslim, including artisans and craftsmen. Increase in demand for handicrafts and luxury items by urban population gave thrust to trade and commerce. Textile production, metal work, shipbuilding and masonary required large labour force. During the Sultanate period masonary, brick manufacture and terracotta decorative art became very popular, and along with it, skilled workers like stone-cutters, curvers, masons, carpenters, metalsmiths were in great demand. Caste-artisans gradually adjusted themselves to new skills and technique imported by the ruling class. With time a syncretic form of architecture developed where indegenous methods and motifs were generously used with imported techniques. Metal industry flourished in some parts of the Delta and blacksmiths and gold-silversmiths formed distinct social groups by themselves with better social status. The process of manufacturing sugar was widely known in Bengal. Good quality sugar was exported from Bengal to different parts of India. Sugar and jaggery were produced in such a scale that it could be taken as a stable cottage industry. By the 15th century paper production found its way into Bengal where it was easily available in important urban centres. Boat and ship-building having a long tradition in Bengal, the activity was revitalized by the demand generated by trade revival. Textile production was the most prominent among locally manufactured goods in the pre-13th century Bengal, the volume and variety of textiles produced and exported increased from the 14th century. Chinese diplomats, foreign travellers, Portuguese reporters - all drew attention on the excellent quality of Bengal textile and its importance in export trade. 14th and 15th century witnessed the introduction of sericulture in the Delta.

Some scholars are of opinion that spread of Islam along the sea-routes of Asia had a direct relation to the restoration of Bengal's overseas trade during the Turkish rule. Behind all these trends there was a long history of maritime trade contact between the Delta and the Middle East

seen through the eyes of Arab geographers and travellers. From the 14th century onwards Bengal was included in the international trade routes. Increase in demand in European markets for spices from South-East Asian countries creating the necessity for manufacture of exportable items in the coastal areas were mainly responsible for restoration of trade in Bengal and Gujrat. Foreign traders and travellers referred in high terms the glory of maritime commerce enjoyed in the Bengal Sultanate. Although mention of local markets, money lenders, small traders, shopkeepers and common people are available in vernacular source, internal trade compared to the richness of overseas commerce remained an insignificant factor in the sources. Presence of foreign trading groups in important cities and ports of Bengal are available in the sources. But there was no comparable Bengali speaking elite trading community engaged in foreign trade. It appears that all surplus or profit was controlled by middlemen and reached through them to foreign merchants.There are view points in opposition to it.

Compared to post-Turkish period, Bengal might not have had a uniform and stable currency system in the pre-13th century period of its history. But the grim picture of absence of metallic coins given by the early Turkish court historians has been reassessed in recent times by the discovery of further numismatic evidences. Dr. N.R. Ray discussed in detail the paucity of metallic currency in the Pala period and its absence in Sena times. He assigned the reasons for it to lack of favourable atmosphere for trade and commerce and decline of urban centres due to it. He did not use the term 'feudalism' categorically in this thesis, but put clear emphasis on the concept of 'self contained village unit' based on natural economy. Although gold coins of Pala period have not been found, yet silver coins of the same period have been unearthed. Dr. Nihar Ray thought that the mentions in the landgrant documents of 'puran' or 'kapardak puran' indicated presence of some kind of medium of exchange. Dr. B.N. Mukherjee opines that 'churni' or 'churna' was nothing but silver dust as medium of equal value to a particular number of kowries. There are other evidences of continuous circulation of coins issued by minor dynasties like the Chandras and the Devas ruling in the Delta from 10th century onwards. Recently Prof. Barrie Morrison has shown that there was marked variations in the economic condition of Samatata with

other parts of Bengal. In the 10th century, when Bengal textile was being absorbed into wider Indian Ocean commercial network, two trade diasporas overlapped in the Delta : one extending eastward from the Bay of Bengal, controlled by Buddhist Bengalis, and the other extending eastward from the Arabian Sea was dominated by Arab and Persian traders. Almost all the major modern scholars agree that Arab merchants had trade contact with pre-Turkish Bengal from the eastern waterfront. Thus a continuity of trade relations has been evidenced in different sources of pre-Turkish period Bengal. Currency on the whole had a greater monetary value than the token value of circulated coins. It was one of the most important instruments of economic change, not only an indicator of the growth of trade and commerce, but also agricultural surplus was shifted from rural to urban areas through an unified currency as cash remittance to the ruling class. It provided a permanent and imperishable form of wealth, other than land, but it also led to increase in production of cash crops and various other commodities. Money circulation for lending and cash circulation was an accepted norm in urban economic life. In the post-13th century period revitalization of overseas trade was supported by a strong currency as a medium of exchange backed up by the process of the acceleration of urbanization. With the Islamization of the polity an Islamic orientation towards coinage was evident; according to Islamic practices every Muslim ruler acquired and asserted the right of sikka and khutbah. By the early 15th century the Islamic concept of assertion of political authority through coinage diffused throughout the Delta and confirmed the numismatic tradition of the Indo-Turkish rulers of Bengal. Coinage was dependent on availability of metals, precious and ordinary. Till recently scholars were of opinion that gold particularly was in short supply during the post-10th century period in India. But it has been conclusively shown in current researches that the existence of billion <alloy of silver and copper> bronze and copper coins reveal the presence of money economy able to meet the needs of trade and commerce. Prof. Irfan Habib pointed to the lack of source of gold leading to its paucity in India. Prof. Simon Digby suggests that most of the gold came from Eurasian sources, also from West Africa through Mameluk Kingdom to India to be circulated in Indian trade. Central Asia, Persia and Afghanistan were the principal suppliers of gold to India from the 11th century: there

was a temporary scarcity due to Mongol menace in the north-west. But J.F. Richards, contesting the view point offered by W.H. Moreland, argues that there was no paucity of precious metals in north-eastern India and in the dependent kingdoms of Bengal, Gujrat, Malwa and Jaunpur. In Bengal, from the inception of Turkish rule to the end of the Hussain Shahis there was adequate supply of precious metal to maintain a stable currency system.

Indian scholars have taken the perception of feudalism as the central theme to determine the reasons for the growth and decline of urban centres in pre-1200 period. But the theoretical premises for the economy of the Sultanate period has been posed differently - a school of economic historians are of opinion that in the Sultanate period pre-13th century type of feudalism did not exist. The economy was of a kind under which a large share of surplus produced by the peasantry was shifted to the urban centres for the consumption of the ruling class, despite the rural economy being controlled by local landholders. Prof. Nurul Hassan provides a 'modified' version of feudalism in the context of medieval Indian society. This type of feudalism could have the potential of playing a significant role in the growth of urban economy. The foreign ruling class were city-dwellers from the beginning, occupied urban centres first, and brought rural areas under their fold later. According to Prof. Hassan, establishment and growth of urban centres was largely the result of new forms of agrarian relationship due to (i) huge demand of handicrafts and luxury items by the local authorities; (ii) supply of commodities needed for maintenance of standing army, mostly stationed in towns and cities; (iii) to facilitate internal and external commerce. Prof. Irfan Habib is of opinion that the new agrarian relationship was in fact a novel form of agrarian exploitation by the ruling class having no stake in land directly; this system gave rise to urban centres of 'parasitical' nature. In another essay he says that urban growth chiefly rested on the surplus extracted in the form of kharaj which was mainly distributed among the ruling class and its dependents and retainers - all of whom lived in cities and towns. Prof. Brajadulal Chatopadhyay does not quite agree with the previous opinions. He says that the very idea of the spurt of urbanism after a gap of several centuries has become 'moribund' at present. There are fewer reasons to support the view that medieval urbanism became possible only

with a noticeable revival of India's trade network. Agreeings' that there was considerable 'expansion of urban economy' during the Sultanate, Prof. Chattopadhyay suggests that the degree and nature of the expansion should be assessed in relation to the kind of change that was already taking place in the pre-1200 period. It is difficult to make out a clear cut definition of medieval economy divided into 'urban' and 'rural'; there were several aspects common to both rural and urban life. The distinction between rural and urban was one of degree and not of kind - the villages exhibited more features of agricultural economy, while cities exposed more of commercial economy. More attention should be focused on this 'rural-urban continuum'.

In building up the history of urban centres in pre -Turkish conquest period, neglect of archaeological sites in Bengal - only three sites have been excavated partially in the last thirty years - has been the most crucial problem. Discussing the urban centres of the 12th century Bengal B. D. Chattopadhyay considers Karnasuvarna as a node of settlement locality having widespread linkages with north and south Bengal and upper Ganges basin. Sandhyakar Nandi's description points towards a developed urban centre in the late 11th and 12th centuries. At this time Bengal was divided into three regions : Varendri / Upper Ganges, Uttar and dakshin Rarh / middle Ganges with subsidiaries, Samatata - Banga / lower Delta. The thesis of Islamization of trade routes and its link with Bengal's overseas commerce has not been fully accepted by some scholars. They say that Lakshmanavati and Nadia were two urban centres present at the end of the 12th century. Poet Dhoiy's reference to the Sena capital Vijaypura (Pancharatha temple of 11th-12th centuries discovered) on the Bhagirathi has been idenlified as Nadia. In Ramcharit there are mentions of use of jewelleries set with precious stones; same mention of ornaments studed with gems and pearls are found in Despara and Naihati inscriptions. Sandhyakar Nandis indication of an overland route from Varendri to the Himalayan kingdoms passing through Nepal, Sikkim and Chamba valley to go to Tibet and China, might have been a trade-route. Vikrampura in the early 13th Century was an urban centre, although a temporary capital. In Idilpur Copperplate of Kesavasena Bakla has been mentioned. So Varendri, Rahr, Samatata did have urban centres before Bakhtiyar Khalji's invasion.

Study of the rise and decline of urban centres in terms of rise and decline of trade and commerce has received due importance in recent researches. Also the relation between the decline of trade and decline in political power has got ample attention from the scholars. A step forward towards the acceleration of the process of urbanization came from organized trade through merchants and traders, or their guilds, specialized markets for locally manufactured commodities and exotic luxury items, through towns and ports. A conspicuous shift from agricultural to non-agricultural economic activities and commercial agriculture was the most significant aspect of this process. Physical growth of cities is not enough substantiated due to the paucity of archaeological evidences. Functional type of cities are generally identified by the economic activities of the residents. The spatial limit in the urban process is a vital factor - density of population climatic condition, vegetation, strategic routes and nodal point providing congenial situation for trading caravans. For natural reasons riverports at the confluence of navigable rivers, or towns at the cross roads of trade routes became marketing and distributing centres. There are two types of urban mobility noticeable : (i) spatial, and (ii) social.

There is ample scope of discussion of typology of the urban centres. The urban nature of Islam made it possible for the ruling class and their retainers and dependents to live in cities which grew as administrative headquarters. The increasing number of iqtas created opportunities for growth of towns and qasbahs. Forts and garrisons grew first into large Muslim colonies and then big cities. Religious groups controlled law and education over and above rites and rituals, and as such a seat of learing was an important factor in the growth of ceremonial or pilgrim towns. Port-towns provided services to both hinterland and maritime organization. It is, therefore, a 'knot' where ocean and inland transport lines meet and inter-twine. Most of the urban settlements were pluralistic by the very nature of the multiplicity of their economic activities and functions. Due to meagreness of source-material it is not possible to determine the degree of urbanization measured in terms of ratio between city-dwellers and countryside population. It has been accepted by the scholars that pace of urbanization was faster in the Sultanate period than in the pre-13th century times. It is difficult to identify a single autonomous causative factor in

the nexus of social, political and economic transformations which resulted in the progress of urbanization in Bengal. Continuity in some of the economically viable traditions from the previous period, a system of collection of revenue in cash, i.e., a more effective method of exploitation of agricultural surplus for urban consumption, a standardized currency of high value and a stable political system under dynastic monarchies - all contributed to the progress of urbanization in the Sultanate period. In the 14th century Bengal was found to be included in international routes, centres of production of manufactured goods and urban centres were gradually activized and organized.

From the early 14th century mints were established in different towns and cities. From the names of mint towns economic and political control and extension was indicated. Mosques and religious institutions were major urban constituents. In a political system which was largely dependent on the military, forts and garrisons were indispensable. Fort-towns often grew as parallel capital. The forts of Mandaran, Chandraketugarh, Bangarh, Devkot, Bishankote, Garh Jaripa and Ekdala came down from the pre-Turkish period. The origin and composition of the fort of Gaur is still shrouded in mystery. Fort served the multiple purpose of strategic importance, security and commercial benefit and was a significant factor in the urban process. Administrative headquarters and specially capital cities played a viable part in the urban growth. Capitals were selected for their strategic positions, either on land-routes or on waterways for easy communication with different parts of the realm, for commercial viability and in the close proximity of a rich hinterland. Lakhnauti/Gaur was a capital city for centuries. From the names of urban centres it seems that most of them belonged to pre-Turkish period, restored and regenerated from the 13th century. In the Turkish period the rulers used to transfer capital for strategic reasons - first in Devkote, then Lakhnauti, Pandua, again Gaur, Tanda in the Mughal period, then Dhaka and finally Murshidabad. In the Bengal Sultanate ports flourished with international trade - the two most famous port-towns were Satgaon and Chatgaon.

It is difficult to assess the level and extent of urbanization on which depended the size, number and population of urban centres. There are three new urban centres mentioned in the epigraphic source and accounts of travellers : Shahr-i-Nau, Habank and Bengala - the origin and location

of these towns have been controversial without more archaeological evidences. Pandua, Gaur, Satgaon, Chatgaon and Sonargaon were the five most important urban centres in the period under study. The moving force behind the urban centres was the spatial and social mobility. Upper class Muslim society and converted Muslim artisan class were main components of urban population. There was a concentration of service people and slave labourers at the peripheral zones of towns. There is evidence of huge increase in urban population recorded by foreign travellers. Also expansion of suburbs of Gaur and Pandua indicate population pressure on these cities. The travellers also speak about the presence of large foreign communities in cities. There are other kinds of small towns along the Bhagirathi which were different by economic base and population content - Khardah, Panihati, Santipur, and above all Nabadwip itself. Reasons for the decline of urban centres were many - natural, political and economic and these are all interrelated.

Many important recent studies reveal the fusion of Hindu-Muslim 'folk' worship with the practices and participation in public ceremonials. In Bengal orthodox Islam underwent a rapid change giving birth to a set of popular beliefs and practices which in essence represented the popular rural cults deep rooted in the pre-islamic past. In the Sultanate period there are clear signs of accomodation and acculturation from upper level of the society to the rural level, at which it was particularly syncretic. Rural religious cults were more successful in bringing about communal harmony in the society than official religious movements. The minor sects were initiated and joined by people who rose from the poor and common section of the society and preached their simple faith among the rural masses through the medium of songs composed and sung in local dialects. In that respect the Baul sect is probably the culminating point of Hindu-Muslim synthesis. These sects represented a fusion of elements both from Sufism and Buddist-Vaishnav tradition percolated into the lowest order of the two communities particularly in rural society, creating a great legacy of syncretism and co-existence.

1

# Socio-political Organisations in the 13th century : Background of Turkish Occupation of Bengal

Watered by some of the largest rivers in South Asia – the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna- and their tributaries having been natural arteries of communication and transport, by them Bengal's physical and cultural sub-regions have been determined. Situated in the north-western Delta of the river Padma, Varendra included the territories presently constituting the districts of Malda, Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogura, Dinajpur and Rangpur. The Bhagirathi-Hooghly basin included several ancient cultural subregions - Sumha, Vardhamana, Radha and Gaur – corresponding to the modern districts of Midnapur, Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad. Ancient Banga included the area corresponding to the modern districts of Dacca, Faridpur, Jessore, Bakergunge, Khulna, Nadia and Twenty-four Parganas. Samatata included the hill-tract east of the Meghna in the south-eastern Delta corresponding to modern Comilla, Noakhali and Chatgaon. Harikela was referred to the Delta's north-eastern hinterland including modern Mymensingh and Sylhet districts.[1]

Under the Palas <AD 750-1161> a regionally based imperial system, patronizing Buddhism, emerged in Bengal. Samatata was under another Buddhist dynasty, the Chandras <AD 825-1035>. During this time,

Bengal through Samatata was linked with Indian ocean commerce, indicated by the presence of silver coinage conducive for participation in oceanic trade. As commercially expansive states rose in eastern India from the 8th century onwards, Buddhism as a state patronized religion spread to other parts of South Asia. The viharas, Vikramshila in eastern Bihar, Paharpur in Rajshahi and Salbon in Lalmai in Bengal were built and flourished from the 6th century to the 11th century. Although some Bengali dynasties continued to support Buddhist institutions almost upto the Turkish conquest, but as early as the 7th century, Brahmanism enjoyed increasing state patronage at the expense of Buddhist institutions. By the 11th century, even the later Palas began supporting Shaivism and Vaishnavism.[2]

The Varmans <1075 AD-1150 AD>, and especially the Senas, <1079 AD – 1204 AD> dominated almost whole of Bengal at the time of Turkish conquest. The Senas were not an indigenous Bengali dynasty, they migrated from Karnataka to the Delta (Bhagirathi Hooghly region) in the 11th century. At first they were service-holders under the Palas, and later, as the Pala power declined, they declared independence from their overlords and first consolidated their control on the Bhagirathi-Hooghly region, and finally moved to the eastern hinterland where they dislodged the Varmans from their capital at Vikrampura. By the end of the 11th century the center of political gravity in eastern India shifted from Bihar to Bengal, while royal patronage was transferred from Buddhism to Brahmanism .

The Senas occupied the whole of <undivided> north Bengal, north, west and north-western part of Rajshahi, whole of Dinajpur, south-west of Rangpur, the western part of the Karotoya, entire Bogura and Pabna districts. In other parts of the region their authority was challenged by different local rulers; the Devas<1231 – 1280> ruling east Bengal were a formidable force to reckon with. Damodardeva <1231-1243> was ruling over an extensive area including modern Comilla, Tripura, Noakhali and Chatgaon. Quite a number of inscriptions were issued by him in 1156, 1158, 1165 of the Saka era convening his twelve year's rule in total.[3] Like the Sena rulers he also took high sounding, ritualistic titles. Damodardeva either defied or ousted the Senas from east Bengal and came to control a large part of it. In one of his inscriptions it has

been claimed that the king recovered Gaudadesa and celebrated the victory by great festivities. In a landgrant he claimed himself Gaudeswara/Lord of Gaur. Amidst political turmoil, precipitated by Turkish invasion, Dasarathadeva succeeded his father in or around 1243 AD. He turned out to be a powerful overlord who defeated the later Sena rulers of east Bengal and occupied their last bastion in Vikrampura. Accordingly he took the tittle of *arirajadanuj-madhava*, who has been referred in shortened form as Rai-Danuj by Minhaj.[4] When Balban<1265 – 1287> was leading an expendition against Tughral Khan<1278 – 1283> for rebellion against Delhi, chasing him he went to Sonargaon and signed a pact with Rai Danuj against the rebel, who happened to be a common enemy of both.

Even after the fall of Nadia in the hands of the Turkish invaders, the Sena dynasty still continued to rule in east Bengal at least upto the middle of the 13th century. Lakshmansena ascended the throne either in 1179 AD or in 1185/86 AD. The Bhawal inscription found in Dacca area, was issued in the 27th regnal year of Lakshmansena and 1206 AD has been accepted as the last year of his rule.[5] After his death his son Viswarupsena <app. 1206 – 1220 AD> succeeded him. He ruled for fourteen years, testified by a copperplate inscription issued in his fourteenth regnal year. In Madanpara inscription it has been claimed that he himself or his son defeated the yavanas.[6] Minhaj also states that the descendants of Rai Lakhmania were still ruling, he came to know about them when he was in Lakhanauti <1242-'45 AD>. Within 1280 three governors of Lakhnauti, Ghyasuddin I'waz <1213 - 1227> Tughril Khan <1258 - 1259> and Izzuddin Balban Yuzbaki <1236 - 1245> invaded eastern Bengal.[7] By the eighth decade of the 13th century there is no mention of the Devas in any source, but in a Sanskrit manuscript <1289 AD> the name of one Madhusena has been mentioned with elaborate royal titles used by once powerful Sena rulers in the past. The reference to Madhusena <1289 AD> as Gaudeswara might indicate that at the end of the 13th century he was still in control of some parts of eastern Bengal, probably the last bastion of Hindu rule in that region. It is possible that during the dominance of the Devas in that region, Madhusena was ruling somewhere else in eastern Bengal, and only after Dasarathdeva's death he recovered limited control of the area. The later

Senas and the Devas controlled simultaneous segments upto the end of the 13th century, even after Turkish occupation of northern and western parts of Bengal.[8]

It is to be noted here how the political authority was decentralized and divided among Hindu overlords of the 13th century when the Turkish army partially occupied Bengal. The reasons for taking long time to occupy the entire Delta despite political decentralization, could be many, major reason being geopolitical. South-west remained under the rulers of Orissa and their vassals. The Devas and the later Senas were still holding on the eastern part, which awaited the final subjugation of the Hindu overlords by the Turkish army. The title Gaudeswara, used off and on and here and there, is an indication of the presence of an idea of a centralized monarchy in the polity, the claim over which was desired or attempted by powerful individuals in the chieftain families, but finally without much success.[9]

In the post – 10th century period in Bengal the Palas, the Chandras, the Varmans and the Senas – all major and minor dynasties showed an elaborately complex state system, increasing social stratification and bureaucratic expansion. Moreover landgrant became a purely royal prerogative, while the donations, at least those in the western and northern parts of the Delta, consisted mainly of agricultural land, monetary yields of which were known and specified; this indicates a thorough peasantisation. Except in Samatata, the grantees were mostly brahmans who received land not only for domestic rituals, but more for performing duties at the royal court; which function was to give an ideological legitimacy to the state. During the Sena rule the ideology of Hindu kingship became fully elaborated in the Delta. They expressed their royal authority by performing the 'great gift'/ *mahadana* in the honour of the patron god, but actually the effective recipients were the brahmans. By the time of the Turkish conquest, the official cult of presiding over state temples and the brahmans under royal patronage, had all settled as central components of the religious and political ideology of the Senas. The ruling class constituted of those groups, with power and authority, who had the right to control and manage the community resources fully; thus landed brahmans were included in the ruling class.[10] Economically revenue came from the segmented local areas: local resources were not

legally and regularly transferred from nuclear areas representing agrarian organizations and production, to a central kingdom. The ruling class survived on the resources collected by local authorities from micro areas under their control. In the early 13th century a segmentary state system prevailed in Bengal in which subordinate chieftain families kept control over the same macro region, but recognized the overlordship of the Senas for quite some time. In this political system centralization of power and control in one particular family was not a dominant factor in the polity.[11] In the beginning of the 13th century when the Turkish power was expanding in the Delta, three independent territories were in existence. Sri Domonpala <1196>, son of a feudal lord, ruled in the Sundarban areas; Ranabankamalla Harikaldeva <1204-1220> had Pattikera area under control, having his capital in Mainamati; the Devas ruled eastern part of the river Meghna, at least upto 1280 AD <Dasarathdeva has been mentioned by Minhaj as Rai Danuj>. The Varmans <1075-1150> also ruled eastern part of Bengal having their capital at Vikrampura, but were ousted before the Turkish conquest.[12]

Landholding in a predominantly agricultural economy was the primary basis of social status in pre-Turkish conquest period in Bengal. The single most significant factor in the economy was the system of *danasasana*/landgrant. Copperplate inscriptions issued from the 10th to the 12th centuries show how this practice penetrated into the courts of Bengal. Detailed lists of state-officials found in inscriptions of the major and minor dynasties ruling the Delta upto the 13th century – the Palas, the Chandras, the Varmanas and the Senas – all show an elaborately organized state system, increasing social stratification and bureaucratic expansion.[13] A kind of social harmony, which had been achieved under the Palas, was disrupted during the Sena rule, when finally the political authority turned out to be exhausted and ineffective at the time of the Turkish conquest. At the end of the 12th century the Sena state manifested syndromes of a feudal bureaucratic institution.[14] Ever increasing number of administrative officials related to landholding heading different units are present in the sources. *Sandhibigrahik* and *mahasandhibigrahik* were the two most important officers who dealt with landgrants. Apart from the royal family, heads of other grantee families were first termed as *mahasamanta* and later as *mahadhiraj*; they were in all possibility chiefs

with no autonomous status. Those, who controlled large areas enjoyed semi-independent status and in the earlier times recognized to a certain extent the overlordship of the Sena rulers. *Mahakshapatlik* was chief revenue accountant and *mahakaranadhyaksha,* head of the writers/ karanas, was in charge of general accounts of income and expenditure of the government. These point towards the existence of an elaborate machinery to keep control over revenue and other resources of the state.[15]

During the Sena rule there was continuous effort to revitalize brahmanical Hinduism. To undermine Buddhist influence, dominant in the society since the Pala times, Vallalsena is said to have ordered colonization of brahmans in his kingdom, 100 families in Gaur, 50 in Magadh, 60 in Bhoj, 60 in Arakan, 22 in Utkala and 22 in Pragjyotish.[16] Instead of granting land to Buddhist institutions and brahman professional groups, as was the practice of the Pala rulers, those who used to render public services, e.g. conducting *pujas* in temples, leading public festivals or teaching students, the whole character of landgrant and composition of grantees changed.[17] With the diminishing political authority of the Sena state, the grants gradually became more individual in nature and smaller in size. Economically it led to fragmentation in landholding and socially to more caste domination of a particular group. The purpose of granting land for maintaining public institutions like temples, viharas, etc., was becoming less frequent.[18]

Land could be granted by king, members of the royal family, ministers, officers of high rank etc,. It was also privately gifted by merchants, landlords, traders, artisans and guilds. Categories of grantees included single person or group of individuals. For grant of a village, excluding parts already granted, it was necessary to take royal sanction, permission from government officers and also from important residents around the area. Even members of the royal family needed permission of some kind for assignment of land.[19] In the Sena period assignment of more than one village was rare, but available. Comparatively more frequent cases are present in the Pala period when entire village or group of villages were gifted. But assignment of areas of smaller extent, such as part of village or plots of land, are more available in both the periods. Three most important factors are clearly determined in the landgrant records of the 12th and the 13th centuries : (i) measurement of land donated;

(ii) fixation of boundary; (iii) determination of yield. During this time there are several instances of grant of smaller plots in different villages or plots scattered in one village – all included in the same gift-charter. An inscription of the time of Visvarupsena furnishes details of the gift of eleven plots of land scattered over several villages.[20]

State patronization of brahmans in a large number of landgrant records indicate at least their partial control on land. In this system *brahamatra* and *devatra* were accepted as agrarian organizations and integrative forces. Landgrants by ruling classes and subsequently, by other socially influential groups, made possible the extension of cultivation, an increase in agricultural activities and a more intensive agrarian organization. It is most likely that this process was followed by the emergence of internal trade centers, initially in key areas leading to a network of such centers dependent on the level of agrarian expansion.[21] Sometimes grants were made for different objectives, there the detail given in the gift-charter are sharply different. Land, cultivated and uncultivated, and residential space were major objects of grants in the rural areas. Three major components of rural settlements – *vastu*, *kshetra* and *gochara* are found in grant records. Local *hattas* and *mandapikas* were meant for mobilization of agricultural produces, both in the form of foodgrains and commercial items. Mechanism of production, mobilization and distribution of agricultural produces was a major economic activity closely related to the political and social hierarchy in the power structure. In the 12th and 13th centuries there is no clearcut picture of agricultural surplus-mobilization for consumption of ruling class and in favour of the growth of urban cntres.[22]

Although brahmans and temples were the major beneficiaries of landgrants, there could be exceptional cases where a gift was not confined to them only – mention of *bhumi pradatta akarena*/land donated free of tax, is available where certain conditions were imposed in the charter, the wise man should always give away land for the gods, for parks, for public gardens and for dwelling houses of the peasants. Excepting the first item the rest are intended to be gifted for non-religious purposes. It has also been pointed out that 'one should not give up an *angula*/finger of land, in such a way to part with rights to it, may, however, be given away (to persons) for their maintenance.[23] A new motivation working

behind landgrant in the later Sena period is evident – the purpose of settling brahmans in large number. If the number of settlers given in the gift charters are to be taken as correct, then a significant social change could be brought about by this lone factor : Paschimbhag plate <late 12th century> whereby a royal charter was issued to create a tax-free holding for six thousand brahmans to settle down; this amounts to colonization of brahman groups, planned and executed by the Sena rulers.[24] In Lakshmansena's inscriptions of the late 12th century and the early 13th century the right of land assignment was a royal prerogative. In his court, Pundit Halayudh Sharma, a courtier and scholar received so much land as grant that he became a rich landlord. It became customary to donate land to brahmans, not for performing public religious duties, but for attending to various services of the royal court.[25] In Mehar plate of 1234, Nasirabad plate of the same year, Shobharampur plate of 1236 and Adivadi Plate of 1283 A.D. large plots of land were assigned to individual brahmans by rulers for acquiring religious merit and for enhancement of personal prestige and influence in the society.[26] Interesting informations may be derived from a copperplate grant of Visvarupsena, one Halayudh purchased numerous plots of land in different parts of East Bengal and claimed them as gifts from princes and ministers, but at the same time with the king's ratification as shown by the use of the royal seal. It is evident here that a royal assignment carried greater security than those obtained by private grant or personal purchase.[27] But details of the transactions by which personal properties were converted into royal assignments are not furnished in charters of grants.

Rules regarding confiscation or resumption of grants/assignments are some times recorded in the sources. Grants awarded by previous rulers was not always respected by successors. Confiscation of donated land has been uniformly condemned by Smritikaras; but they also had to accept the right of the king of resumption of donated land. The donee could never claim an inalienable right, although the gift made in his favour might be interpreted by the donor as permanent and heritable. Forfeiture in default of certain conditions may have in some cases warranted resumption of grant. Sometimes land donated previously was subsequently resumed and a fresh charter was issued to convey the land

for new assignment; in that case the word *punaray/* 'again' was carefully used.[28] The Shaktipur copperplate of Lakshmansena offers an example of similar, if not of identical nature. It is revealed in the charter that the above grant was made in exchange of *kshetrapataka* which had been previously granted by his father, Vallalsena, to a brahman. This was granted by mistake, and when the real fact was brought to the notice of the next ruler, Lakshmanasena, he issued an order for a fresh gift.[29]

Many of the grants, discussed above, were awarded when Bengal was being invaded and had already been partly occupied by the Turkish conquerors. This long tradition of assignment of land, generally to brahmans and temples, continued down to the time of the gradual overthrow of the local Hindu rural aristocracy which was finally subverted and subjugated by the Turkish arms. Almost throughout the 13th century, regions where Turkish occupation was incomplete, the traditional practice of land assignment by issuing copperplates continued. It may be inferred, therefore, that in the pre-Turkish occupation period brahman groups, in alliance with the royalty, were one of the most dominant elements in Bengal society.

From the 8th century onwards Arabs started expanding empires of Islam; their commercial supremacy on the high seas was established from Spain to the eastern waterfront. From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, the trade supremacy which had once been enjoyed by the Egyptian and the Roman traders, passed into the hands of the Arab merchants. This shift in trade balance was reflected in the overseas trade and commerce of Bengal. The commercial prosperity enjoyed by her under the Palas came to an end. With the decline of Buddhism, through expansion of both religion and trade which kept Bengal in contact with the outside world, foreign trade relations were disrupted. Description and appreciation of Tamralipti by Hiuen Tsang and I'Tsing prove its prosperity and fame as a port and commercial centre.[30] But upto the 13th century, before the rise of Saptagram, there was no other port of such eminence and importance in western part of Bengal; even Tamralipti was not mentioned any more in the later sources. In the Sena-Varman period there was increasing rigidity of brahmanical Hinduism; injunctions against foreign trade were imposed by the Smritikaras/law givers forbidding travel overseas; this social factor might

have worked as one of the many obstacles to maritime trade and commerce. Due to all these, Hindu-Buddhist cultural influence and trade relations with South-east Asian countries declined.

According to Dr. N.R. Ray, with the decline in overseas trade and commerce Bengal economy became more and more dependent on land.[31] Small self-contained village units based on agriculture and barter system led to economic stagnation. Decline in trading and commercial activities was reflected in the society where traders and artisans depended on land. In the copperplate landgrant records there is no evidence of influence of traders, craftsmen, artisans, etc. either as donors or donee, the main beneficiaries being brahmans. From the late Pala period to the Sena rule there is enough proof of increasing demand and dependence on land. Agrarian dominance in the pre-13th century economy, dependent on small village units, mostly having barter system, was responsible for scarcity/absence of metal currency. Scarcity or absence of a sound monetary system having a currency of high value, was not conducive to trade and commerce. The presence of precious metals like gold and silver, in profuse amount, in the forms of family wealth and treasures in rich temples, are available in the sources; but their circulation through coinage was stopped. Extreme cheapness of some commodities, particularly of daily domestic consumption, required exchange by the smallest possible currency. This requirement was easily fulfilled by the use of kowries under the Senas, 1280 kowries were equal to a tanka, and in the Sultanate period its value went down to 8000 to make a tanka. As natural object kowries did not incur any manufacturing cost; it has to be noted here that even in early times kowries were imported from Maldives against rice, and this denotes some kind of trading activity outside the Delta.[32]

From the 11th century to the 13th century the pace of urbanization in the Delta partially slowed down for various social and economic reasons, absence or paucity of metallic currency and decline in overseas trade being the two most vital factors. On the eve of Turkish conquest cities like Devkote, Karnasuvarna/Rangamati, Sompura/Paharpur, Gaur/ Lakhnauti, Triveni/Saptagram, Vardhaman, Suvarnagram, etc., were declining urban centers. In northern Bengal, on the left bank of the Karatoya, the ruins of Mahasthan extending over 30 sq. miles, have

been excavated. Extensive ruins of palaces, houses, boundary walls, viharas and temples bear an eloquent testimony to an ancient and prosperous urbanized area. In the 13th century there was no evidence of its existence. Specially the north-west of the Delta suffered more from decline in urbanization.

Although there was general economic decline in pre-Turkish period, the picture was not equally dismal everywhere. Definitive economic and social variations in different regions of Bengal are evident in the sources. Prof. Barry Morrison and Dr. R.M. Eaton put a lot of emphasis on the regional economic and social variations between the north western and south eastern part of the Delta.[33] Evidence indicates that Bengal's north-western and western subregions were more deeply influenced by brahmanical culture than was the eastern Delta, which remained less peasantized and less sanskritized. This has been observed in the pre-13th century land use and brahmanic settlement patterns of the 7th century Landgrant in modern Sylhet/Srihatta describes the donated territory as lying "outside the pale of human civilization."[34] Grants of uncultivated land were typically made in favor of either to groups of brahmans or to Buddhist monasteries or both with a view to colonizing the land and bringing it into the orbit of agriculture. The Chandra rulers granted an enormous area of some 1000 sq. miles in Sylhet to the residents of eight monasteries; they also settled a large number of brahmans on the land.[35] It has already been noted that by the 13th century the brahmans are present as a landholder class in the society, and the status of the trading community, who had patronized Buddhism and received patronization from the Pala kings, went down at the sametime. According to traditions king Ballalsena forcibly lowered the caste-rank of the Suvarnabanik (Gold-smith) community. From contemporary Sanskrit literature and in landgrant records extensive list of names of lords and designations of bureaucrats point towards the prevalence of subinfeudation in land system.[36]

The pattern of brahman immigration to and within Bengal also was different from the west to the east. West Bengal was geographically contiguous to the upper and middle Gangetic zones. From the 9th century increasing number of scholarly and ritually pure brahmans migrated from the Gangetic zones into Bengal, most of whom received fertile

land in the western Delta. In the eastern part <Comilla-Chittagong area> the landgrants tended to be local in nature, donees being brahmans from neighbouring parts within the Delta. Thus higher ritual status in social ranking was associated with brahmans of the north and the west of the Delta, and lower social status to the brahmans of the eastern part.[37] Also the mythological sanctity of the Ganges and its association with brahmanical definition of ritual purity made a difference between the east and the west. With reference to the eastern Delta no such sanctity has been attached to the Padma; this was because the principal channel of the Ganges flowed down the Delta's western corridor. As a result, the sanctity of the river lingered on in West Bengal, while the eastern two-thirds remained symbolically disconnected from Northern India, the region of pristine Aryanisation.

Differences between the south east and the north west are also noted in patterns of urbanization. Using archaeological data Prof. Barry Morrison has made comparative calculations of the total area of Bengal's six principal royal palaces, the four largest of which were located in cities of Varendra <north-west Bengal>, the other two located in the east and south–east were many times smaller in size. It partially reflects the importance of Varendra, always at the center of political gravity, owing to its contiguity with neighbouring territory of Magadh and the middle Gangetic plain.[38] The data on the size of palaces should also be an indicator of a greater degree of urbanization and population density in the Delta's north-western sector than was the situation in the east and the south. The question still remains to be answered why at the time of Turkish conquest the urban centers of the western and northern part of the Delta were in decline. There are several other reasons for cultural difference between the west and the east- the main factor has to do with the climatic condition. The Bhagirathi-Hooghly region gets much less rainfall than the eastern part of the Delta, this, along with the proximity of the sea on the eastern side has influenced the economic activities and cultural patterns of both the parts.

Compared to the condition prevailing in the north-western part in the pre-Turkish period, the economic situation in south-east Bengal was markedly different. The Deva rulers of this area consistently issued a type of coins, in imitation of the Gupta coins, from the 6th century to the

11th century. Excavations of Kutila-Mura in Mainamati indicate trade contact with Arab merchants, which continued for centuries before Turkish invasion of Bengal.[39] South-east Bengal exported cotton textile, earthenware and probably rice in exchange of gold and silver to South China and South-east Asia, which was the source of coins of the Chandra dynasty with the symbols of trident and bull. They maintained a silver coinage which was more conducive for participation in overseas trade. Samatata under this Bengali Buddhist dynasty <825-1035 AD> was linked with the Indian Ocean commerce. Evidence for Chandra dynasty coinage is based on a hoard of about 200 silver coins discovered in Mainamati.[40] The mint place given on some of these coins is 'Pattikera', the name of a village still extant in modern Comilla district, their capital being in Vikrampura, Lalmai-Mainamati region proves to have some urban centers which enjoyed trading activities : Samandar and Ramu of Arab geographers, Vikrampura lauded as *jayaskandhavar*, Pattikera as the famous mint-town, Dhritipur as a *hattak*/market were urban centers of Samatata. Economic viability of the region has also been proved by the discovery of Abbasid dinars and dirhams in the excavation sites of Mainamati. Compared to this condition the urban centers of north-west Bengal lost their commercial importance : in reference to land system in Samatata, regional difference has been emphasized by Prof. Barry Morrison when he says that in contrast 'the copperplates from Samatata record gifts to Buddhists, as well as to Brahamanas, rather than to an individual, as is the case elsewhere in the Delta. Many of the property-holdings being transferred were much larger than anywhere else'. According to him large land-grants to institutions, exsistence of a high quality silver currency and the largest known concentration of major building sites in this area prove the existence of a more stable political and administrative conditions compared to other regions.[41] Dr. Bratindra Nath Mukherji has conclusively proved that Harikel <modern Chattagram area including major part of south-east Bangladesh> had its silver coinage from the 7th to the 12th/13th century AD.[42] There are two series of Harikel coins, and according to him, palaeographic features of the legend of the coins of the second series are more developed than those of the legend of the coins of first series, so the majority of them should be dated as later. Some of the coins may be palaeologically dated to as late as the

12th century or the 13th century. Stylistically, typologically and metrologically these coins may be related to the silver coins of the Chandra dynasty of Arakan. The Harikela coins, in their turn, served as the prototypes of the silver coinage of Pattikera <including the locality of Mainamati in the Comilla region of present Bangladesh> of the 8th century AD, and also of silver specie of the Arakan family <of Comilla area or some neighbouring territory> of about the same period. Thus it is evident that in the 12th – 13th century period there had been definite regional economic and social variations in different parts of the Delta.[43]

# 2

## Turkish Political Authority : Consolidation and Indegenisation

Theoretically Islamic state was a theocentric autocracy. There was very little method of check and balance on the authority of the ruler except the restrictions imposed by the ulama in the name of the Shari'a. Political authority of a ruler was morally justifiable only when he effectively acted as the defender of the faith. According to Islamic political theory, a ruler's main duty was to extend and defend the frontiers of Islam, to protect life and properties of the believers, to carry on justice according to the dictates of the Shari'a and to fight the non-believers till they either paid tribute or accepted conversion. Three types of rulers, suggested by al-Mawardi, clearly show the practical problem arising out of the vast expansion of Islamic territories throughout the world : (i) ruler with limited authority, (ii) ruler with unlimited authority, (iii) ruler with sovereign independence.[2] The conceptions of political authority emanated from the earlier vision of the ruler as the successor/Caliph of the Prophet who combined spiritual and political leadership of the entire Muslim community worldwide.[3] But the caliphate lost control over not only territories but also on the unified political and spiritual leadership of the Muslim world. From the 9th to the 11th centuries started the movements of whole confederation of Turkish speaking peoples from Inner Asia to the eastern provinces of the

Caliphate. The Ghaznavids and the Ghurids carried the Perso-Islamic civilization in northern India. In the early sultanate period in India <13th century> the original Islamic political theory could not cope with the situation where the ruling class was Muslim and the rest of the ruled were non-Muslim. The ulama insisted on the ruler's duty to strictly conform to Islamic identity. In reality compromise was effected to ease out the contradiction between theory and practice.[4] Ziauddin Barani says that Iltutmish <1210-1235> made clearcut difference between *dindari* and *dinpanahi* of Sultan. Barani also mentions that Alauddin Khalji <1296-1316>, without paying much attention to the Shariati dictates, did what he considered to be in the interest of the state – this was *jahandari*, a political concept based on practical experience of governing.[5] With it the emphasis from spiritual leadership of the ruler passed on to the political role of the Sultan. A ruler's authority was no more dependent on divine appointment, or on ethnic heritage, but on his ability to maintain state security and public order; the image of the defender of the faith and protector of the believers only had to be changed to an image of the guardian of the subjects. This paternal image of the Sultan was manifest in the pomp and splendor inherited from Persian imperial legacy.[6] But in the early period, the Sultan's role as the defender of the faith by an outward show of conformity to orthodoxy was maintained to keep religion as the basis of unity in the army and the nobility, as well as, for demanding implicit loyalty from the subjects.

The conflict within the Islamic political system between spiritual and temporal power created many problems. Consequently it produced a number of theological compromises to suit varying situations. The ulama tried to make theoretical adjustment by equating the Prophet's theocracy to the Sultan's autocracy. Almost every ruler used to find an appropriate chapter and verse from the Quran to impress upon his subordinates and subjects that rebellion was not permitted in Islam; in this procedure he was always supported by the theologians he patronized. Powerful Sultans were given the right even to interpret religious injunctions according to necessity. In reality ideals and practices of the Sultanate were often contradictary to the principles of the Shari'at.[7] Often than not attitude and life-style of Sultans were supposedly anti-Islamic – lavish day to day living, no religiosity observed, indiscriminate killings of co-religionists in

conquest and rebellion – are some of them.[8] Also, Sultan's divine position was untenable in Islamic monotheism.[9] To hold high the image of an all-powerful omnipotent sovereign, various symbols of power were used- huge residential palaces, spectacular court, big harem, innumerable slaves, acquisition of immense personal wealth, control over public finances, distribution of non-religious patronage dependent on only personal discretion, military expenditions against territories of even Muslim rulers – these were to maintain a façade of glory in the eyes of all. A spectacular and lavish court was the symbol political success of the royalty. Crown and throne as the symbols of royal omnipotence exhibited through the court were introduced from Persian models. Religious sanctity and royal legitimacy were maintained by the presence of the ulama and famous Sufi elites in the court. This political ideal of the sultanate and the life-style of the royalty were imitated by the nobility, military governors and minor rulers under the sultans; Bengal Sultanate was no exception to this pattern of Muslim political authority.[10] Monarchcal absolutism was the basic vision of worldly authority. But by the 13th century there had also appeared, in countries ruled by Muslim rulers, the spiritual, as well as, worldly authorities of Sufis. Their worldly authority sometimes paralleled and sometimes opposed to that of the rulers. Thus it is to be noted that from a very early period in Indo-Islamic world there is a long history of conflict between these two aspects of authority.[11]

In Bengal a slow progress in the articulation of Islamic political framework is notable in the first hundred and fifty years of Turkish occupation. During this period <1204-1342> Bengal remained as a province of the Delhi Sultanate. In the initial period Turkish political domination was founded on territorial conquest. Bakhtiyar Khalji's notion of proper instruments for acquiring legitimacy were khutba, sikka and raising monuments for Sufis. The two most important factors for consideration were, of course, the overlordship of the Delhi Sultanate and the newly founded Muslim community settled in the occupied territories. To the local population conquest of territories and seizure of ruling power created more impact than the publicity of legitimacy through Islamic instruments. Presence of a powerful cavalry was more of a reality of their defeat in the hands of the Turkish army. Bakhtiyar himself struck a gold coin in the name of Sultan Muhammad Ghori of Delhi with one

side depicting Turkish cavalryman charging at full gallop and holding a mace in hand, at the bottom an emblem with the phrase' Gauda Vijaye' in Sanskrit script.[12] It was obviously to highlight the fact that cavalry was the pillar of their military strength by which they subjugated the people; the phrase in Sanskrit was meant to convey the message to the local Hindu chiefs.[13] Six years later Ali Mardan Khalji <1341-1345>, declared independence from Delhi and issued silver coins which also bore horseman image.[14] When Delhi restored overlordship on Bengal and coins were minted in the name of Iltutmish <1210-1235> which again bore the same image. R.M.Eaton is of opinion that such reliance on military power is also seen in the earlier Turkish-Bengali monuments.[15] Notable in this respect is the 'minar' at Chhota Pandua near Triveni, built at the end of the 13th century, when Turkish power was still being consolidated in that part of the Delta. It could serve the ritual purpose of calling the faithful to prayer, but its form and height could as well suggest that it served the political purpose of announcing victory over the vaniquished. According to Eaton, Bengal's earliest surviving mosques also convey the spirit of an alien ruling class simply transplanted to the Delta from elsewhere. Constructed <or restored> in 1298 AD in Tribeni Zafar Khan Ghazi mosque appears to represent the earlier vision of Indo-Turkish architecture.[16]

The early Delhi Sultans were constantly preoccupied with repelling Mongol threats throughout the 13th century. But Balban and Alauddin Khalji transferred the nobles, in large number, to far away places, like Bengal, to avoid their hatching conspiracy against the Sultans in Delhi. To determine the status of governors in Bengal, show of implicit obedience, share of ghanima and payment of tribute were absolute preconditions to maintain peace with Delhi; any deviation from this amounted to rebellion. Despite all these pressure, throughout the 13th century, governors of Bengal tried to assert their independence from their parent body in Delhi. Every rebellion was accompanied by the bold ambition to situate themselves within the larger political scenario of surrounding regions.[17] To show the dominance of the Delhi Sultanate as the supreme political authority in Muslim India military invasions were led by them in person to crush the rebellions in Bengal. The situation somewhat improved with the founding of a hereditary governorship <1287-

1328> by Nasiruddin Bughra Khan, second son of Balban, which remained and continued within their family till the Tughloq's came to power in Delhi. In this context no institutionalized political system with a centralized administration was possible.

As the governors of Bengal rebelled against Delhi, their assertion of independence was followed by their adoptation of even more exalted titles on their coins and inscriptions to legitimize their right to autonomy. When the governors accepted their subordinate role as representatives of the Delhi Sultanate, the names and titles of the contemporary Sultans, with their own names, were added to the coins. But in cases when they asserted independence from Delhi, they associated their names with that of the contemporary Caliphs. Inordinate personal ambition and assertion of political self is evident in titles used by Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji <1213-1227> in coins and inscriptions. He also asserted to legitimize his status as independent ruler by surpassing the Delhi Sultan by proclaiming himself directly the Right Hand and Defender of the Caliph of Bagdad <al-Nasir, etc.,>.[18] Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi not only invaded Bengal to crush the rebellion by reannexing it, but attempted to upstage Ghyasuddin I'waz in the matter of Caliphal recognition <1227 AD>. He made it a point to receive robes of honour from Caliph al- Nasir in Bagdad and sent a canopy to be bestowed on his own son who had become governor by ousting and beheading Ghyasuddin I'waz. For the time being the Delta was politically reunited with north India for the next thirty years. Malik-ul-Mulk-al Sharq/Lord of the East was a title commonly used by Bengal governors to denote their hold over Eastern India without any specification of the nature of rulership.[19] Alauddin Ali Shah <1341-1345>, Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah <1339-1349> and Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah <1348-1352> all three of them called themselves Helper/Right Hand of the Caliph.[20] In 1258 Baghdad Caliphate had already come to an end, instead of mentioning any name of a particular caliph, the system of using 'al-Nasir' became common.[21] Before the foundation of independent Sultanate was laid, the Balbanis <1287-1328> used to declare themselves as Sultan bin Sultan/ Sultan son of sultan in reference to the founder of the dynasty, Balban, even when they were virtually free from Delhi's control.[22] Ruknuddin Kaikaus <1291-1300> took high sounding titles to prove himself as a parallel power to the Delhi

Sultanate.[23] The Balbanis, even their governors, claimed their hold over Persia, Turkey and China. 'Sikandar Sani' was a favourite title among the Turkish rulers in India.[24]

The first dynastic monarchy introduced by Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah <1342> brought forth new political ideas. By this time basically the principle had to be accepted that Islam could have multiple caliphs outside the Arab world. Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah of Delhi broke the tradition of invoking the name of the last Caliph for legitimization of political authority.[25] This revolution in Islamic political thinking was happening just about the time when Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah asserted independence from the Delhi Sultanate and finally became successful. Ilyas Shah has been mentioned by Afif as Shah-i-Bangalah and still more curiously, as Shah-i-Bangaliyan.[26] These terms have a strong political overtone by indicating the area and the people on which Ilyas Shah ruled.[27] In 1342 he forced out Bengal from Delhi's control and established for the first time a monarchal system and dynastic rule which led to the foundation of an independent Sultanate for next two hundred years in her history. Initially Delhi did not let its hegemony go very easily. In 1353 Firuz Shah Tughloq led an enormous army down the Ganges to punish the breakaway province, but finally failed to reannex the Delta to Delhi's authority. Five years later he made another attempt by invading Bengal which was repulsed by Sikandar Shah <1357-1389>. Having successfully defended his kingdom, Sikander Shah asserted his independence and power by erecting Adina Mosque, a monument greater in size than any edifice previously built by any sultan of Delhi. An inscription on its western façade claims Sikandar Shah to be 'more liberal and more perfect of all the Sultans of Arabia and Persia.[29]

The imperial pretensions of the monarchs of the first independent dynasty is seen not only in the monuments they built, but also in the titles they used. Sikandar Shah used titles like Abul Mujahid, al-Mujahid fi sabil ur Rahman, etc,. But a significant factor is that for the first time he called himself 'Imam ul-Azam' and here imam is synonymous to caliph. Abdul Karim explains this factor as dependent on the contemporary political situation in northern India.[30] Sikandar Shah and and Firuz Shah Tughloq were not only contemporary rulers, but also arch enemies. Firuz Shah Tughloq received investiture with the title of

'Sultan us Salatin' from the Abbasid Caliphs of Egypt. Sikandar Shah went one step further by taking the title of 'Imam' for himself; he took this bold step with the consent of the ulama. After Sikandar Shah, Ghyasuddin Azam Shah <1391-1410> and Saifuddin Humza Shah <1411-1412>, both used the titles of Sultan us Salatin.[31] But Humza Shah faced the rise of a Hindu Amir, Raja Ganesh <1410-1418> who ultimately usurped the throne by eliminating the former. In this political crisis Humza Shah issued a coin in which he claimed himself as the Protector of the Believers, the coin was specially designed to appeal to his Muslim subjects expected to rally round him against the infidel usurper.[32] But by using the title of Imam/Khalifah of God by the Ilyas Shahi rulers the idea of indivisibility of Islamic sovereignty was challenged and Bengal theoretically and practically emerged as a sovereign independent sultanate.[33]

Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah <1418-1433>, the neo-convert son of Raja Ganesh, declared himself Khalilfat Allah and Sultan us Salatin in the usual way. But curiously enough in some of his inscriptions, he used the word Amir in place of Sultan. M.A. Ghafoor has proved that Jalaluddin had diplomatic relations with the Timurid ruler of Herat, Shah Rukh, who had assumed the title of Amir and it is a possibility that the Bengal Sultan imitated it.[34] Sultan Jalaluddin came to power after a prolonged political and religious crisis precipitated by inter regnum in Bengal. To divert attention of the people from crisis at home he established diplomatic relations with powerful Muslim states such as the Mamluks in Egypt and the Timurids in Herat; he wanted to assert himself as an independent sovereign recognized by other Muslim rulers beyond the confines of Hind.[35] His weak status as a neo-convert Muslim ruler was needed to be vindicated in the Muslim society in Bengal. Declaring himself as Allah's successor, Jalaluddin needed the support of the ulama, who by this time, were more interested to please the Sultan by practice than to conform to Islamic theory.[36] Jalaluddin's son, Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah <1432-1436>, was a weak ruler and failed to declare himself as Khalifat Allah, instead, he explained his title as 'by proof and evidence Allah's successor.[37]

Nasiruddin Mahmud I was restorer of late Ilyas Shahi dynasty, who should also be claimed the founder of the Mahmud Shahi dynasty. He

used the same phrase, 'the Khalifah of God by proof and testimony', a practice that continued till the accession of his son Ruknuddin Barbak Shah <1459-1474>. Dr. Abdul Karim is of opinion that this particular title was used as a continuation from the neo-convert rulers of the House of Raja Ganesh.[38] In a Mahmud Shahi inscription where it is said : "In the reign of the Sultan of the Time, with justice and benevolence, Refuge of Islam and the Muslims, Helper of the State and Religion, Father of the Wagers of the Holy Wars, Mahmud Shah Sultan, July 20, 1443." Yusuf Shah <1474-1480> used an interesting phrase, Zillu-Allah Fil Almin/Shadow of God on Earth.[39] Jalaluddin Fatah Shah of Mahmud Shahi dynasty <1481-1487> inscribed Majjad-allahu-i-Fatah/ may god make him victorious and also 'Hussain Shahi' and 'Syyed Shahi' on coins.[40] Abdul Karim opines that the last two phrases were added to indicate his alliance with Alauddin Hussain <later Sultan Hussain Shah Syyed> with whose assistance he rose to power.[41]

Alauddin Hussain Shah <1493-1519> was the founder of Hussain Shahi dynasty <1493-1538> and deliverer of Bengal from Abyssinian tyranny <1487-1493>. He assumed the regal title Khalifah of God by proof and evidence.[42] This title had a long legal and historical background. Legal authority of the Caliph was recognized by most of the rulers of Bengal in the monarchal period. <1204-1242> With the foundation of dynastic monarchy the attitude of the Ilyas Shahis changed towards this institution. They dropped name of the Caliph and assumed legends like Helper of Islam, Protector of the Muslims, etc,.[43] The title Khalifatullah was first used by Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah <1418-1433> and since then used by the Mahmud Shahis <1436-1480> and the Hussain Shahis.(1493-1538) Hussain Shah came to power by supplanting the Abyssinians. He needed the support of his Sunni Muslim subjects in his role of a legal sovereign and the title Khalifatullah was used to legitimize his rule.[44] But in the later phase of his rule Hussain Shah and also his successors made a complete departure by dropping theocentric titles; kalima appears in few of the Hussain Shahi coins. His main thrust was political; in one of his inscriptions he is called Kamru- Kamta-Jajnagar-Orisha Vijayee, etc,.[45] He also emphasized his personal charisma through family glory as he was called Alauddin bin Syyed Ashraf, al Hussaini.[46] His son and successor Nusrat Shah <1519-1532> did not even mention

himself as a Syyed or descendant of the Prophet; al Hussaini was adequate for him, and other Hussain Shahi rulers followed the suit. They believed in fullfledged political sovereignity without any overtone of theocentrism. This political attitude was reflected in their policy towards the non-Muslim subjects.

Following customary Islamic system of sikka and khutba were performed as early as in the time of Bakhtiyar Khalji <1204-1206 AD>, and since then these were part of the political practice in Bengal. Khutbah, a customary declaration by a Muslim ruler of his coming to power, used to be read out at the general Friday prayer in Jami mosques. This practice had serious political significance – these were sort of publicity instruments to communicate political information to the people, and also public assertion of royal prerogative of the reigning Sultan in front of all sections of subjects. To have the khutbah recited and to have the right to sikka /coin money were the two cherished rights of a sovereign, and no sultan/ruler could lightly proceed to perform these practices without a firm hold over the throne. Sikka did not simply mean the right to issue coins; coins issued in the name of a Sultan from different mint-towns indicated the extension of territories occupied by a ruler. Its concern was definitely of public nature in the sultanate . The disastrous result of forcing a currency on unwilling people is aptly illustrated by the experiment of Sultan Muhammad Tughloq of Delhi <1324-1361>. Khutbah and sikka were performed by Bakhtiyar Khalji right in the beginning of Turkish occupation in Bengal. Minhaj mentions that Bakhtiyar Khalji issued coins, the information which was repeated by later chroniclers, but no coin was discovered, till lately Dr. P.L. Gupta reported a coin dated May 12, 1205, on one side a rider with a spear and the name of Mughisuddin Muhammad bin Sam in Arabic script and on the other the pharase 'Gauda Vijaye' in Nagri script, obviously struck on the occasion of the conquest of Bengal, but in the name of Muhammad bin Sam, the Sultan, his overlord in Delhi. Alauddin Ali Mardan Khalji <1208-1211> openly declared independence and struck coins which have been recently reported by G.M.Farid and Mr. N.W. Lowick.[50] Among other early rulers, a large number of coins issued by Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji <1213-1227>, have been discovered. Malik Mughisuddin Yuzbak <1252-1257> whose territory under control comprising of Bengal, Bihar

and Avadh, equaling that of the contemporary Delhi Sultanate itself, had khutbah recited and coins issued in his name from Lakhnauti. Mughisuddin Tughral <1268-1281> followed the suit when he rebelled against Balban. The period when Bengal was considered a province of the Delhi Sultanate <1204-1338>, khutbah and sikka were performed with mention of the names of Delhi sultans.[51] Sometimes there is no mention of these practices in the sources, but in cases where independence from Delhi was asserted, these were specially mentioned to indicate assumption of sovereign power. These practices had more political significance in the early phase upto 1338 AD; with the foundation of the independent Sultanate, with some exceptions in the time of political crisis, these practices were followed routinely by the rulers.

Investiture from Caliph of Islam had a long constitutional and political background in the Muslim world. Theoretically the supreme unifying force in Islam, spiritual as well as political, was the Caliph. Acceptance of authority in any person, other than the Caliph was not legal, and as such, not permissible. But the believers in different parts of the world were allowed to recognize a proper person as their leader if he could secure investiture from the Caliph.[52] With the vast expansion of the empires far and wide, Abbasid Caliphs started the practice of issuing sanads awarding legal and moral sanction to Muslim leaders in different parts of the world. Robe, sword, umbrella and canopy were selected as marks of recognition and approval; high-sounding titles like Amir-ul-Muslimin / leader of the Muslims, Naib ul Khalifa/Deputy of the Caliph, Saif-ul Islam/ Sword of Islam etc., etc., were also bestowed upon the Muslim leaders. Muslim rulers, on the otherhand, had the legal and moral responsibility to accept the Caliph as the supreme sovereign of the Islamic world by mention. In 1258 the army under Hulagu Khan captured Baghdad and executed the reigning Caliph, al-Mustasim. But for half a century after this event coins struck by the Delhi Sultans continued to invoke the name of the last Caliph of Baghdad for the legitimization of their authority. Finally Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah of Delhi broke this tradition and declared himself caliph of Islam.[54]

The system of seeking investiture from the Caliphate was introduced in Bengal quite early to give it an aura of an independent political entity within the Muslim empire in India. In the first turbulent twenty-five

years <1220-1226> of Turkish occupation, the Khalji Amirs and Maliks vied with each other to capture power while the Delhi Sultans tried to keep control on them. In this period of power struggle the question of legilimization was one of utmost importance. There was only one way of asserting independence from the clutch of Delhi – to prove oneself a legilimate parallel political authority. For that purpose it was essential to get recognition from the supreme legal and spritual authority in the eyes of Islam and the Muslims – the Caliph.

The process of Bengal's political and territorial separation received a fresh impetus under Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji <1213-1227> who followed a deliberate policy of consolidation of power in his own hands. He needed recognition from the contemporary Caliph of Baghdad for two reasons : (i) to legitimize and secure his position in the eyes of the Khalji Amirate, fighting for final capture of power in Lakhnauti; (ii) to assume the position of a parallel ruler by freeing himself from the control of Iltutmish. After closely examining the coins of Ghyasuddin I'waz, Edward Thomas stated <1873> that the former received the diploma of investiture from the Abbasid Caliph al–Nasiruddin Ilahi of Baghdad.[56] He received three sanads/letters patent and also the title al-Nasir/the Helper. On one side of the coins the kalima is inscribed, on the other side al- Nasir al Din Allah/Amir ul Muminin is inscribed.[57] But the problem starts when Minhaj – i- Siraj, who visited Bengal within twenty-years of the death of Ghyasuddin I'waz, in 1243-1244, does not mention about such an important matter like Caliphal sanction; at the same time the learned Qazi is full of praise about investiture received by Iltutmish in Delhi.[58] Iltutmish, at a much later date, struck coins similar to those of Ghyasuddin – kalima and name of Caliph on one side and name of the Sultan on the other side. Now it has been revealed that Iltutmish issued coins with Caliphal inscription three years before he actually received the investiture. Prof. I.H. Qureshi stated that after the vast expansion of the Muslim empire many independent Muslim rulers, to legitimize their position, started using the sanction. A compromise situation was created when the Jurists evolved a theory, where any matter, not forbidden by the Caliph, was legitimate. According to Dr. Abdul Karim, Ghyasuddin I'way Khalji imitated the type of coins issued by the Ghazni Sultans and without asking actually for the sanction, he used the

name of the contemporary Caliph; and finally it was Iltutmish(1210 – 1236) who imitated the Bengal coins.[60] By the presently available evidence, it is difficult to come to any conclusive decision of the controversy.

Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji's assertion of independence was taken as rebellion by Sultan Iltutmish(1210-1236) of Delhi. In his second invasion of Bengal Ghyasuddin was defeated and executed. Through Nasiruddin Mahmud, the Delhi Sultan's son, <1226-1229>, Iltutmish obtained direct control on Bengal.[61] In February, 1229, Caliph al Mustansir Billah of Baghdad <1225-> rewarded Iltutmish with sanad, khilat, saif and honorific title of Shams- al Din/Sun of Religion.[62] As a mark of affection, and also of recognition of his political authority, Iltutmish sent a part of the khilat, a red royal umbrella, a canopy and the title, Malik us Sharq, to his son Nasiruddin Mahmud, already governor of Bengal. Two coins of Nasiruddin have been discovered with the name of Caliph-al-Zahir Be'amr Billah on them.[63] Seeking and receiving investiture depended largely on the political stability of the Caliphate. Due to destabilization following the fall of Baghdad Caliphate in 1258, this became uncertain. There is no evidence in the sources of sanction sought by the rulers of Bengal, although most of them went on using caliphal titles on coins and inscriptions long after the fall of the Baghdad Caliphate. custom of legitimization by extraterritorial means became less crucial from the time of the Ilyas Shahis when they succeeded in founding dynastic monarchy independently.

The early Ilyas Shahi Sultans, after making Bengal independent from Delhi, asserted their claims of legitimacy by emphasizing pan-Islamism and imperial bases. This was claimed not only through association with the contemporary Caliph but in the lavish patronage of Islamic holy places by Sikandar Shah's son and successor, Ghyasuddin Azam Shah <1389-1410> who sponsored the construction of madrasas in both Mecca and Medina. Moreover, although the Bengal Sultans continued to inscribe most of their monuments and coins check. From mid 14th century onwards they asserted their claim to political authority in Perso-Islamic terms. Ghyasuddin Azam Shah, to satisfy his literary interest and to give an international colouring to his court, invited the famous poet Hafiz Shirazi to come to his court in Pandua, his capital.[64]

After a political crisis, precipitated by the capture of power by Raja Ganesh leading to ulama rebellion and invasion of Bengal by Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi of Jaunpur, neo-convert Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah <1415-1416 & 1418-1438> finally rose to the throne. He sought and received investiture from al- Ashraf al-Din Barsbay, the ninth ruler of the Mamluk Burji dynasty of Egypt. At the same time, in his coins he directly declared himself as Khalifat Allah.[65] In his turn he sent gifts and presents to the rulers of Egypt and Damascus by his ambassador, Ala ul Bukhari. Jalaluddin, the son of Raja Ganesh, accepted Islam for political reasons and one may surmise several reasons for his securing investiture (i) to give legitimacy to his accession to the throne; (ii) to appease the ulama since his accession was supported by them (iii) to prove his commitment to Islam despite being a neo-convert ruler.[66] Seeking investiture was a political move, because he never used the name of any Caliph on his coins and inscriptions. Actually he adopted Persianized royal paraphernalia modelled on the Sassanian imperial style. Foreign dignitaries who visited Pandua court in the early 15th century remarked on court ceremonies which could be distinctly detected as Persian; the description of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah's court given by the Ming Chinese ambassador is a testimony to this point.[67] This was a deliberate policy in the early sultanate period, to assume the dignity of a sovereign independent state and to claim equal authority with international rulers. Adina mosque inscription of Sikandar Shah does not even compare the Sultan with the contemporary rulers of the Indian subcontinent, but gives examples of the kings of Arabia and Persia.[68]

From the foundation of the independent Sultanate, the principal focus of attention was on the assertion of political authority by the Bengal rulers. As the power and strength of the Sultanate consolidated, the question of legitimization became less important. Also, by that time the power-play between the central Turkish political authority in Delhi and the rebellious Bengal rulers had come to an end. Direct influence of Sufis and ulama on court politics was also reduced with time. There was no extraterritorial right implied in caliphal sanction on this far. away land, its main significance lies in the idea that Bengal rulers also belonged to the mainstream of global Islam.

Rule of succession always proved a controversial political problem

in Islamic state system. In the initial stage of Islamic polity, theory upheld election, but practice worked in favor of hereditary system. Theologians urged that 'only one who is dead and absent can have a successor or vice-regent'.[69] This particular definition was applied at various times in different regions as widely apart as India and Turkey. But the core of the problem lay in the fact that despite the acceptance of hereditary system, the law of primogeniture was never accepted as political principle. This led to uncertainty in succession, followed by conspiracy, fratricidal struggle and assassinations within the family circle. Famous jurist Qazi Ibn Jama'a of Damascus <1333> says : 'The sovereign has a right to govern until another, and a stronger one, shall oust him from power and rule in his stead. The latter will rule by the same title and will have to be acknowledged on the same grounds, for, a government however objectionable, is better than none at all, and between the two evils we must chose the lesser.' In short, power led to success and success legitimized usurpation. The principle of might is right is carefully guarded and worded by the logic of a choice between anarchy and autocracy. At the close of our period of discussion, Babur <1526-1530> noticed the problem of absence of succession rules prevailing in Bengal. He observed that any powerful person could forcibly remove the reigning monarch and ascend the throne; immediately after, the nobility, the officials, the soldiers and the peasants bowed down to pay submission to him as legitimate ruler in place of the former one.[71] Nizamuddin and Faria y Souza confirm this.[72]

From the conquest of Nadia by Bakhtiyar Khalji <1204> to the assumption of power by the Balbanis <1283-1328>, there was no necessity of any succession rule, as no hereditary political right was recognized yet. For assumption of political authority, till then no association of regard was shown to an older established family. Principles of hereditary succession became evident during the rule of the House of Balban. Although Nasiruddin Bughra Khan(1283-1287) was appointed governor of Bengal by his father, since his time the same post was retained in his family. Bughra Khan <1283/1287-1291> administered Bengal as his father's representative up to 1287, in which year Balban died. From 1287 to 1291 Bughra Khan ruled as an independent ruler without aspiring for the throne of Delhi, after his father's death.[73] The House of Balban

came to an end in Delhi with the rise of Jalaluddin Firuz Shah Khalji <1290-1295>, but it continued in Bengal for more than forty years. Next two rulers after Bughra Khan, Ruknuddin Kaikaus <1291-1301> and Shamsuddin Firuz <1301-1322> happened to be his sons.[74] The dynasty came to end at the time of Bahadur Shah <1322-1328>. In the forty years rule of the Balbanis, Bengal emerged from a decentralized Amirate to a hereditary governorship. This was a fitting prelude to the future dynastic monarchy under which Bengal achieved independence for next two hundred years.

Bengal went through a period <1328-1338> of utter chaos and turmoil in the early years of Tughloq ascendancy from which it was forced out by the first two Sultans of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty. As political authority was consolidated in their hands a definite pattern in succession emerged. From Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah to his great-grandson Saifuddin Humza Shah <1342-1412>, no lapse of years between the reigning monarchs indicate that a normal order of dynastic succession already came into being.

First Ilyas Shahi dynasty came to an end with the rise of Raja Ganesh<1415>, when there was a temporary government temporarily upheld by a non-Turkish ruler. His converted son Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah ruled approximately from 1418-1433. Despite being the son of a Hindu Raja, who had been considered an usurper by the Sufis and the ulama, there was no problem in the succession of Jalaluddin's son, Shamsuddin Ahmed Shah <1433-1436>, although he was assassinated by his slave Nasir Khan.[75] Nasiruddin Mahmud I <1436-1459> was raised to the throne by the nobility; this dynastic change was brought about without any bloodshed. In the later Ilyas Shahi/Mahmud Shahi dynasty <1436-1486> hereditary succession was followed throughout. Between the fall of the Mahmud Shahis and the rise of the Hussain Shahis <1493-1538> there was seven years of Abyssinian misrule <1486-1493>, after which Alaudin Hussain Shah <1493-1519> was nominated to the throne of Bengal by the nobility. The Hussain Shahis also maintained a hereditary monarchy till 1538 AD.

There were certain exceptions to the general rules of succession in the monarchal system as practiced in Bengal. Since some scholars were of opinion that sikka by Muslim rulers was primarily the insignia of

sovereignty and as such its right used by son/brother/male member in the life-time or in the rule of a reigning monarch meant rebellion.[76] This exception observed in the Bengal polity under Turkish rule, has been considered as 'rebellion', syndrome by Blochmann, R.D.Banerjee, Kalika Ranjan Qanungo and R.C. Majumdar. A.M. Habibullah first attracted notice to this factor by pointing out that in case of Bengal, sons and successors of some reigning sultans received the right of issuing coins in their own names.[77] Later this hint was taken up by Abdul Karim and M. R. Tarafdar, and the latter worked out the idea in detail.[78] According to M.R. Tarafdar this system came down from the time of the Abbasid Caliph who gave the title of Wali Ahad/ Successor Prince with various high-sounding adjectives attached to it. This became a custom and institutionalized in Spain, Egypt, and other Muslim countries. In the highly urbanized economy currency was mostly needed in ports and towns from where coins were circulated in different foreign countries through trade and commerce. In the urban centers, through the ruling class, the nobility, the ulama etc., gold and silver coins were circulated as medium of exchange. As there were few communication media in those days, coins were used for informing political/religious information to the people. In the life-time of a reigning monarch people were informed of the name of his successor so that they were prepared beforehand to accept him as the next ruler. Wali Ahad was usually appointed governor of an important administrative unit and was given the right to issue coins in his own name to be circulated in the area under his control.[79] Wali Ahad system with right of sikka added political legitimacy to future successor.

Earliest among the Bengal rulers was Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji <1213-1227> who was aware of this Abbasid system. He also showed an international outlook which could have been conducive to his assertion of independence from Delhi. In 1220 and 1222 he issued two coins with the legends of Wali Ahad and Ala-ul-Haq wa Din and circulated them.[80] During the rule of Shamusuddin Firuz Shah <1301-1322> three of his sons-Jalaluddin Mahmud Shah <1307-1309> of Lakhnauti, Ghyasuddin Bahadur Shah <1310-1322/1324> of Sonargaon, and Shihabuddin Bughra Shah <1317-1318> of Satgaon struck coins in their names in the capacity of governors of the above mentioned areas within the life-time

of their father. Ruknuddin Barbak Shah <1459-1474> struck coins within the life-time of his father,Nasiruddin Mahmud I, and gave the same right to his successor, Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah <1474-1481>.[81] This practice was also followed by the Hussain Shahi rulers. Blochmann was the first scholar to notice the 'irregular' issue of coins in the name of Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah <1519-1532> during the reign of his father, Alauddin Hussain Shah <1493-1519>, when he remarks : 'They either indicate an extraordinary delegation of power or point to a successful 'rebellion'.[82] M. R. Tarafdar strongly objects to the 'rebellion' theory. His arguments are : (i) Alauddin Hussain Shah was too powerful a monarch to allow any rebel, even his son, to flourish within his kingdom; (ii) the four mint-towns <Nasratabad, Muhammadabad, Fatahbad and Hussainabad> from where Mahmud Shah III <1533-1538> issued coins in the reign of Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah, must have covered quite an extensive territory; but in the contemporary sources there is no evidence of any rebellion or even conflict between the two brothers to indicate Mahmud's seizure of political power by revolt.[83]

The practice of Wali Ahad appears to be a delegation of extraordinary power to the successors nominated by the reigning monarch, and not a symptom of rebellion. It was not even joint rule in the sense that it then would not only mean the right of sikka, but would also indicate sharing of other ruling rights. This system was tried specially in dynastic rules where power-struggle in different groups of the nobility, infighting within ruling families, forcible usurpation in case of a weak ruler and hold of the religious groups on succession through legitimization, etc., perpetually hampered the process of political stabilization. Permission to Wali Ahad to issue coins in his own name demonstrated to the people that he already had the prerogative to inherit his predecessor's kingdom. By observing this simple rule of nomination of a succesor and his political legitimization, he could gain experience in administration to become a responsible ruler in future.

The critical question of how far the Turkish political system was theocentric remains to be answered. Theoretically a ruler was responsible to the believer as a political as well as a religious person. His religious image was upheld by performing different religious customs and patronising religious groups. In practice he was to govern Muslim and

non-Muslim laity. Often than not, the polity, due to the ambivalence of theory and reality, needed to integrate non-Islamic trends in the society. Political power in unrestricted autocracy could never permit any cheek on it imposed by the injunctions of the ulama or the dictates of the Sufis. If religious obligations were given superior consideration to political, Turkish rulership could lose its autocratic character.[83] Conversation between Alauddin Khalji and the Qazi, and also, dialogue between Jalaluddin Khalji and his nephew, Ahmad Chap, are too well-known to repeat.[84] On the other hand, Sultans wanted to get political benefit out of this alliance. Generally their religiosity was restricted to utilizing Islamic practices like khutbah and sikka, attendance to Id and jumma namaz, erecting places of worship, ziyarat to holy places, appointment of the ulama to official posts, patronization and financial assistance to the Sufis and religious institutions, and to deliver justice according to the dictates of jurists.

Different urban religious groups, the sufi and the ulama, were naturally keen to justify and insist the theocentric base of Turkish polity in various ways. Despite the growth of political and quasi religious factors in the sultanate, the most critical aspect was the place of sultan in orthodox Islam and the reaction provoked by his political role with the defenders of Islamic orthodoxy. Since hereditary monarchy was not warranted by the Quran, kingship was justified by the orthodox Sufis and the ulama as a divine ordination. Accordingly learned sufi elites put forward a few essential ideas to keep control on the polity : (i) Sultans were persuaded to adopt a course of strict Islamic orthodoxy; (ii) Sufis were to be accepted by sultans as advisors not only in spiritual matters, but also in political affairs; (iii) They were to be projected to all as spiritual guides of sultans. These ideas led the Sufis in forging close links with the institution of the sultanate which they hoped to reform and purify of any un-Islamic influences. Whatever the idea of political self and practical necessicity of autocratic rulership was, the Sultan, still wished to be considered during his reign, as well as to be remembered by posterity, as a true believer. Also he had to act in close association with the Sufis and the ulama to secure his position by legitimization in the eyes of the army, the nobility and the subjects. This complimentary position has been clearly reflected in medieval historiography where court chroniclers like

Barani, Khawand Mir, Firishta, Abul Fazl etc., customarily start their history by eulogizing the reigning monarch, emphasizing his divine right and spiritual role. They read God's favor and anger from historical events. Islamic political system, at the height of its success, meant divine approval, whereas defeat and decline pointed to heavenly curse, which could be caused by deviation from faith. It was the right and responsibility of the Sufis and the ulama to bring back fallen believers, even sultans, to the framework of Islamic orthodoxy.

In Bengal the purist role of the Sufis is evident from the malfuzats and maktubats. Their conception of Islamic rulership and its rights and duties indicate the method of keeping control and exerting influence on the political authority of the sultan. In Rafiq al Arefin it has been recorded that Ghyasuddin Azam Shah <1391-1410>, third sultan of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty, often asked his classmate the learned Nur Qutb Alam that in the Hadith there was a saying that those who followed religious rules and rites carefully and those who did not follow them at all, both were to be cursed in the eyes of God- how could this self-contradictory statement be explained? The Shaykh immediately replied that the first half of the saying was to be applied to sultans and officers- if they became too much involved in religious matters and neglected their responsibility and duty, then they were going to be cursed by God; second half of the saying was directed to religious people who, in case of their failure in performance of rites and rules were to be cursed by God.[87] This simple explanation shows that the moral duty of the ruler as defender of the faith was to be balanced by his temporal duty as protector of the Islamic state. Only this sense of balance could justify the complimentary position of state and religion as co-extensive concepts in Islamic polity.

Turkish rulers of Bengal were no exceptions to these trends. Their personal faith did not necessarily cause any orthodoxy to be reflected in their state policy. To them Islam was a socio-political system, as well as religious, and except on personal and individual level, they were least concerned with its spiritual aspect. As has been pointed out earlier, belief in the efficacy of prayer, attending general prayer-meetings and community festivals, visit to the tombs of patron saints, were some of the general features of their religious policy. Their founding and funding of Islmaic institutions served two-fold purposes : (i) to show power and

spectacle of the monarchy to the common people (ii) to keep urban religious intelligentsia dependent on and subservient to the government by granting them land and financial benefits.

When Turkish governors and iqtadars revolted against the sultans of Delhi, they needed support from the religious persons for some sort of legitimization. Thus we see that just before declaring independence from Balban, Malik Mughisuddin Tughril <1278-1283> distributed large amount of gold among religious groups whose support he needed in the ensuing fight against not only the Delhi Sultan, but also his rivals at home.[88]

Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah <1339-1349> gave special privileges to dervishes; but at the same time he fought and killed Saida <Syyeda> a dervish administrator of Satgaon, who dared to show political ambition by revolting against him.[89] Alauddin Ali Shah <1339-1342> was a devotee of Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrizi <d. 1346> and sought his blessings in the power struggle with Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah <1342-1358>.[90] In this early period of expansion of 'Islamic frontier' the Turkish rulers sometimes invoked the idea of jihad to inspire their soldiers to fight against the Rajas. Ghyasuddin I'waz <1213-1227> declared jihad against Vishnu, the powerful minister of king Ananga Bhima III <1211-1238> of Orissa, When the Malik found it difficult to stir his soldiers in the face of imminent defeat.[91] Finally he was greatly helped by Jalaluddin, Imamzadah of Firuzkoh and son of Imam Jalaluddin Ghaznavi, who delivered an inspiring tazkir/sermon to rouse the soldiers into jihad in the cause of Islam.[92] Malik Tughril Tughan <1230-1246> declared jihad <1243> against king Narasinha I of Orissia in which historian Minhaj volunteered <7th June, 1243> his service for the cause. In the Battle of Katasin <1244> the Turkish army was defeated and in the words of Minhaj 'many holy warriors <ghazis> attended martyrdom'.[93] These are the relevant examples of how the idea of jihad was utilized to explain political purpose of territorial expansion in terms of Islamic concepts. With the gradual completion of Turkish conquest, idea of jihad being used in the fight against non-believers became less frequent or ceased to be applied.

Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah <1342-1348> used the prefix Haji to his name to emphasize that he had taken pilgrimage to Meeca. He used to

visit the tomb of Masud Ghazi and wished that he could pay visit to Shaykh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi. In the conflict with Firuz Tughloq, a famous contemporary Sufi of Bihar, Sharafuddin Yaha blessed Ilyas Shah.[94] Both the Delhi Sultan and the Bengal Sultan sought support of different religious groups in their ensuing fights, Ilyas Shah had a mosque built at the khanqah of Shaykh Ala ul Haq of Pandua <13th December, 1342>. Several mosques have been attributed to Sikandar Shah <1358-1391>, the most famous being Adina mosque, as stated before.[96] Shaykh Yahya of Maner corresponded regularly with the Bengal Sultan and refused to bless Firuz Shah Tughloq in his second invasion of Bengal <1358>. But Sikandar reacted sharply against the Sufi savant Shaykh Ala ul Haq, for spending large amount of money publicly and having widespread hold and influence on rich and poor alike in Pandua. He banished the Sufi to Sonargaon, but later allowed him to return to the capital.[97] This shows that a powerful ruler like Sikandar Shah was not ready to share authority with a Sufi, however respected and popular he was. From the time of Ghyasuddin Azam Shah <1391-1410> the urban sufi elites became a powerful social group. Azam Shah rebelled against his father, Sikandar Shah, who was killed in an armed encounter with the son. The former ascended the throne of Bengal after killing several of his step-brothers.[98] Support of the Sufis and the ulama was necessary for him to justify his accession by bloodshed, and thus to give an air of legitimization to his rule. He indulged in luxury in his early life, but later led a pious and simple life to keep a correct image in the eyes of the Sufis and the ulama.[99] The story of Ghyasuddin Azam Shah and Qazi Sirajuddin's sense of justice has become legendary in the history of Bengal.[100] Azam Shah regularly corresponded with his contemporary Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, and was a classmate and great admirer of Shaykh Nuruddin Qutb Alam.[101] Muzaffar Shams Balkhi was one of the finest examples of reformist Sufis in the sultanate Bengal, who totally rejected urban court life, but kept effective indirect control over a number of contemporary rulers by advising and counseling them from his khanqah.[102] In Mecca and Arafah and also made arrangements for their maintenance through the Sheriff of Mecca. At home he made arrangement for easy and safe journey of Hajj pilgrims by ship from Chatgaon on a special request from Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi.[103]

After the death of Ghyasuddin Azam Shah <1410> the sultanate became considerably weakened due to internal strife. Though the sultanate aligned itself ideologically with the Middle East, it was already deeply rooted politically and socially in Bengal. This fundamental contradiction shaped the most acute domestic crisis that it faced – upheaval due to the rise of a Bengali noble, Raja Ganesh <1410-1415, 1416-1418>to the throne of Bengal.[104] By the beginning of the 15th century he seems to have wielded effective control over the rich lands running along the Ganges between Rajshahi and Pabna. He <his family> has been referred in a contemporary letter as *chahar sad sala zamindar*/a land holder of four hundred years<standing> his family, coming down obviously from the Pala and Sena times.[105] He was the kind of person whom Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi meant and referred as a 'vanquished unbeliever' exercising political anthority over Muslims in Bengal. During the weak rule of Shihabuddin Byazid <1412-1414>, Ganesh, according to Firishta, <1613>, 'attained to great power and predominance' and he finally became 'the master of the treasury and the kingdom'.[106] When the Sultan died Ganesh, 'raising aloft the banner of kingship seized the throne and ruled for three years and several months.' Nizamuddin Ahmad, without mentioning the usurpation of the throne by Raja Ganesh, only says that after the death of Shihabuddin Byazid Shah 'a zamindar of the name of Kans acquired power and dominion over the country of Bengala' and his *muddat-i-istila*/ period of power lasted for seven years.[107] The Sufi elites reacted with shock and outrage at this. The most eminent and influential sufi of the time, Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam, wrote a letter to Ibrahim Sharqi, Sultan of neighbouring kingdom of Jaunpur, imploring him to invade to rid Bengal from the hands of Raja Ganesh and save Islam.[108] There are several opinions regarding Sharqi invasion of Bengal : in Chinese source <1415-'20> the invasion was desisted when the Sharqi Sultan was placated by gold and money; Afghan source says that Shah Rukh, the Timurid ruler of Heart, intervened in Bengal-Jaunpur crisis and the invasion was deferred;[109] an Arakanese source reveals that one of the kings of Arakan gave Raja Ganesh military advice by which the Bengalis were enabled to defeat the Sharqi Sultan. There is no proof that the Turki nobility rebelled and resisted Raja Ganesh.[110]

After ulama rebellion and Sharqi invasion Jadu, son of Raja Ganesh, was formally converted to Islam by Nur Qutb Alam, and started ruling independently as Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah. A continuous run of coins minted during the height of the turmoil from 1410 to 1417 indicates that the Turkish rulers continued to hold dejure authority in the Delta, and the symbolic structure upon which the realm's political ideology had rested over two centuries, was not disrupted, the coins, in Jadu's Muslim name Jalaluddin Muhammad <1415> were issued simultaneously from Chatgaon, Sonargaon, Satgaon, and later from Faridpur suggesting an ensured acceptance to power as the legitimate ruler over Bengal. But from 1417-18, just a year, no Sultanate coins are known to have been issued anywhere in the Delta. During this short period two successive Hindu kings, Danujmardandev and Mahendradev minted coins from Chatgaon, Sonargaon and Triveni-Pandua <chhoto>. It has now been accepted by the historians that Raja Ganesh made bid to keep political control in his own name having acquired in Sanskrit the title and passed it on to Mahendradev as his successor, but with no success. The conjecture that two above mentioned Hindu kings were the descendants of Deva dynasty has yet to have more evidence.[112] From 1418, Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah's coins started reappearing, which show a dramatic reassertion of the sultanate authority in the whole Delta. The neo-convert Sultan was specially keen to prove himself a pious Muslim to the sufis and the ulama. He sought and received investiture from caliph al Ashraf Barsbay of Egypt, adopted Hanafi code of law, rebuilt the mosque demolished in his father's time, supported construction of a college in Mecca, and reintroduced kalima on his coins which had stopped being a practice since the time of Ghyasuddin I'waz <1213-'27>. Jalaluddin, after consolidating his power and legitimizing his rule, did not attempt to hide his identity as the son of a Hindu noble; he proclaimed his paternity on the coins as bin Kans Rai or bin Kans Shah.[113] In the early part of his rule the sufi elites of Pandua were made the most influential social group and he did it by particularly submitting himself to the personal influence of the capital's leading Chishti shaykh Nur Qutb Alam. His son and successor Ahmad Shah <1433-1442> served Nur Qutb like a slave.

In the social sphere syncretism of Hindu-Muslim components had

already started working in the Ilyas Shahi period <1342-1414> and was continued and enhanced in the later Ilyas Shahi/Mahmud Shahi rule <1436-1486>. In this period power and influence of religious groups were reduced to a certain extent. Rukuddin Barbak Shah <1459-1474> took firm steps against two most important religious personalities of his time.[114] Shaykh Jalaluddin Daqini, a well-known sufi leader and disciple of Shaykh Piara, lived like a king, and even sat on a throne, which was taken as a defiance to royal authority. The Sultan took note of his wide-spread influence and suspected his motive. The Shaykh was executed with all his immediate followers in 881 A.H. The Sultan also ordered the execution of Ismail Ghazi of Rangpur <1474> by being misinformed by a Hindu officer that the Ghazi had dared to challenge the royal authority.[115] Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah <1474-1480> made an effort to raise the moral standard of the subjects by putting a ban on drinking publicly. He also asserted the royal authority when he ordered the ulama of his court that they should be impartial in religious matters and maintain proper relationship with the sultan. He personally gave judgement to three cases where the qazis had failed to impart proper justice.[116] Under his rule Kadam Rasul and Darasbari motsques were built in Gaur.[117] Jalaluddin Fatah Shah <1481-1487> followed liberal policy towards all his subjects. He was also a great builder, his mosques in Dacca, Sonargaon, Satgaon, Sylhet etc., deserve special mention.[118] The rule of the Mahmud Shahis offered indeginisation and secularization of political authority to the sultanate.[119]

But in the later period of the Mahmud Shahi rule the sultans were responsible for the appearance of the institution of military slavery. In the 1460s and '70s in place of Central Asian Turks, black slaves from Abyssinia were recruited in large numbers for military and civil service. Within a short time they subverted the very purpose for which they were employed. In 1486 a coupd' etat ended the Mahmud Shahi dynasty plunging the sultanate into seven stormy years of misrule and bloodshed. Habshi ruler Shamusddin Muzaffar Shah <1491-1493> killed learned and religious people and also people of noble origin.[120] It is quite possible that he faced tough opposition from the sunni orthodox groups and old Mahmud Shahi nobility, and he decided to eliminate them. An inscription <1487> of the Abyssinian ruler Saifuddin Firuz <1487-1490> is an

interesting record throwing a new light on the social history of the late 15th century Bengal.[121] Dr. M. R. Tarafdar is of opinion that it contains the tradition of Panjtan Pak <The Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hassan and Hussain>. The inscription from the gate of a fort proves the presence of the shi'it element in the ruling class in Bengal society.[122]

Abyssinian misrule was brought to end by a coup by which Alauddin Hussain Shah came to power in 1493, and with him the last important ruling house of independent Bengal, the Hussain Shahi dynasty <1493-1438> was ushered in which is generally regarded as' the golden age' of the independent Bengal sultanate. In terms of physical extent and territorial expansion, too, this was the sultanate's high tide, and Hussain Shah managed successfully to make a circle of vasssals of his immediate neighbours : Orissa to the South-West, Arakan to South-East and Tripura to the east. He already extended the northern frontier by Cochbihar, Kamta and Kamrup.

In the twenty-six years of Hussain Shah's reign <1493-1519>highest number of mosques were built, thirty-six out of his fifty-eight inscriptions have been found on mosques.[123] Hussain Shah was a Syyed by birth and he scrupulously observed the duty of a Muslim ruler by building Islamic institutions and granting subsistence to Pir families. Every year he went on foot from Ekdala to Pandua to pay visit to the dargah of Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam.[124] Nasiruddin Nusrat shah <1519-1532> also built several mosques and raised symbol of the foot-print of the Prophet on a black platform, added to Kadam Rasul mosque <1530>. The famous Borosona mosque in Gaur was completed in his time <1526> and a gate was added to the dargah of S. Akhi Sirajuddin Usmani <1526>.[125] In the Hussain Shahi period the court still followed a Persian model of political authority. But apart form the Persianized political symbols and rituals that survived, all references to external sources of authority on coins and inscriptions of the sultans were totally dropped and they relied instead on the dynastic formula. Publicly as a statement of state policy, Hussain Shahi rulers identified themselves with local society and culture. There are many indications of this factor from Indo-Turkish architecture to support extended to Bengali language, etc., and patronization of Hindu service elites.[126] Sultan Mahmud shah III <1532-1538> dedicated a bridge using Sanskrit language in Bengali script on its inscription and it dated

according to Hindu calender.[127] From the early 15th century onwards, the sultanate articulated its authority by indigenous elements, and secure in power, the Hussain Shahi Sultans presented themselves to all subjects as local rulers without any reference to Greek conqueror and Arab Caliphs. But the palmy days of the Hussain Shahi dynasty were numbered as Babur overthrew the last rulers of the decayed Delhi sultanate, the Lodis, when the defeated Afghans moved down to the Gangetic plain and entered the Bengal delta. Within less than half a century Bengal witnessed a drastic transformation of its political fabric.

With completion of territorial conquest, foundation of a Muslim society, consolidation of Turkish political authority, a strong state emerged in Bengal, where religious façade was to lend a cultural overtone to the political structure. From the Ilyas Shahis to the Hussain Shahis the role of the sultans was thoroughly politicized. The sunni jurists, in formulating the concepts of rulership, always kept in view the existing political and social context and attempted at compromising with political reality within the framework of canon law. Thus certain norms and values emerged from the early conquest and consolidation of political authority which influenced the more of the society as much as it was influenced by the local society itself.

# 3

## Transforming Social Groups : Towards Acculturation and Accommodation

From the early 13th century Bengal society was evidently in the process of change, the older political framework being visibly shaken by the new tremor and subsequently the impact was felt not only in the urban Turkish occupied areas but in the rural areas as well. First hundred and fifty years after Turkish invasion there was continuous attempt on the part of the invaders to subjugate the territorial overlords and local chieftains in order to extend the territories for permanent occupation. In this process they were confronted by the old Hindu aristocracy ; in the first stage of invasion they were confronted with the Senas, the Devas, etc., who still had large areas under their control. After the eighth decade of the 13th century these territorial overlords are not heard any more. From the late 13th century to the early 14th century, when the Turkish arms penetrated into the interior of Bengal, the old Hindu rural aristocracy, represented by the local chiefs, opposed the invaders, but with little success.

In the 13th and the early 14th centuries, at the initial stage of occupation, several types of Hindu chieftains are indicated in the sources : (i) territorial overlords having control over large areas with autonomous status; (ii) increasing inheritance in land holding in the

pre-13th century period led to segmentation of land under caste- Hindu chieftains who were termed as 'ranas', 'rais', by the Muslim historians.[1] These were the chiefs who opposed the Ghorian conquerors and early Delhi Sultans, identified by Minhaj; (iii) local petty land-holders referred to as 'bhowmik', 'bhuian', also 'raja' in the traditions.[2] The first category was directly defeated by the Turkish army and brought under subjugation, (ii) the second type was included in the vassalage system by which they paid tribute to immediate local political authority (iii) the third category of petty landholders came into conflict with a group of ghazis, a very special feature in Bengal, when they converted and colonized at the rural level.

The polity, which gradually came to emerge after Turkish occupation, was conceptually different from the kind of political system that prevailed in the pre-13th century period. In the new polity the previous segmentary state system was giving place to a more centralized administration, leading finally towards a fully independent dynastic monarchy. But the socio-economic process which was initially introduced in the early stage of Turkish occupation had to be built up, for practical purposes, on the prevailing organizations and the older institutions. Accordingly, the old Hindu aristocracy had to be inducted and integrated into the new polity, thus the system which emerged included both continuation and change in the process, more of continuity in the rural areas.

The semi-independent local chiefs were still in control of vast territories; they were identified by the Muslim chroniclers as rana, rai, raut, etc. According to Raverty the word 'rayagan' in Minhaj, should be read as 'ranagan', because, the plural form of 'rai' was 'rayan'. Cavalry captains of rais were called 'rawat'.[3] Barani later followed similar usages in his account of the 13th century events. Rawats/rauts were men of lower status than ranas. Rais and ranas maintained independent defence system; they used to keep large number of payaks/foot soldiers (paiks in Bengal) and dhanuks/archers. They could not stand before the Turkish army despite their superiority in number.[4] All these facts point towards the existence of an earlier feudal hierarchy of ranja, ranaka, rana, rai, rauta, rawat, etc., fairly established in the epigraphic sources from many parts of northern

India.

In early years of the 13th century, north-western part of Bengal was occupied by Bakhtiyar Khalji (1200-1206) and this area was governed by his muqtis and walis. Bakhtiyar sent Muhammad Shiran Khalji<1207-1208> to south-west Bengal; but there is no mention in Minhaj about exacting tribute from them.[5] Ali Mardan Khalji (1208-1211) attempted to expand his territory in the south-easterly direction of the river Karotoya. According to Minhaj, the Hindu rais were subdued in this area and they regularly sent tribute in fear of Ali Mardan Khalji.[6] He also mentions that when internal strife among the Khalji military captains reached a peak, some of the Hindu chiefs revolted against the muqtis.[7] Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji (1211-1226) led his army against the Raja of Kamrup, which was divided among Hindu bhuians, and reduced them to tributaries, but they used to revolt against the Turkish authorities at the earliest opportunity. Minhaj also claims that the kings of Kamrup, Orissa, Bang and Tripura sent tributes to Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji.[8] Mughisuddin Tughril (1278-1283) imposed tribute on the Hindu chiefs of Mandaran area. He led an expedition against Kamrup and was strongly opposed by a confederacy of Hindu chiefs and their overlord, 'the Rai of Kamrup'.[9] He also invaded Tripura, taking advantage of succession crisis there; he supported Ratan Fa<Buddhist>, one of the contenders for the Tripura throne, who agreed to pay him tribute for the support received.[10]

Throughout the 13th century and in the early part of the 14th century Turkish muqtis and walis largely depended on the tribute exacted from the local chieftains and also on plunder in cash and kind (cattles, prisoners of war, slaves, etc.,) from unpacified areas. Immediately after conquering an area territorial chieftains were subjugated and brought under vassalage system in which they retained the right to administer their original territories by paying tribute to the Turkish authority. Thus, with the Turkish military conquest and occupation becoming more complete, the old local aristocracy lost military power, and their semi-independent status in the previously autonomous regions under their control. Their autonomy being subverted and subjugated; in the next phase of history, they were

integrated and inducted into a bureaucracy and emerged as part of the rural-urban ruling class in the new political structure.

The 14th century witnessed the gradual process of shift from one system to the other. The people lived in a period of transition, the older economic and social institutions were slowly being transformed and new ones, with changing patterns, were taking place. But with all the changes some older orders in the society had to be continued for practical purposes. By the first half of the 14th century the polity was transforming towards the foundation of dynastic monarchy in place of decentralized iqtadari and gubernatorial systems. By the process of subjugation, and simultaneously, by a process of transformation, the old local aristocracy was being changed into different types of superior rural class. In the fourth decade of the 14th century both sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-1358) of Bengal and sultan Firuz Shah (1351-1388) of Delhi sought the support of the Hindu chiefs in their ensuing fight (First Battle of Ekadala - 1354) for supremacy in Bengal.[11] Ilyas Shah led military expeditions against Tirhut, Champaran, Gorokhpur and Nepal, the rais of which areas were made vassals paying annual tribute to the Bengal Sultan.[12] As late as the sixth/seventh decade of the 15th century, Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1470) led military expedition against the Raja of Tirhut/Mithila to punish him for non-payment of tribute to the government.[13] Malik Andil (later Saifuddin Firuz Shah - 1486-1489) led expeditions against the border areas of his kingdom; it is not clear in the sources whether the chiefs failed to pay tribute or they revolted against the government.[14] It is proved by these facts that territorial expansion and pacification was going on simultaneously for a long period of time.

With the foundation of the independent sultanate (1342-1538) the ranas and rais were gradually integrated into the emerging Turkish political system, thus altering some basic trends of the previous period. The first wave of invasion was gradually ebbed away giving place to a fresh political idea which recommended the Turkish rulers to accommodate themselves with the local chieftains in their joint fight against the imperial power of Delhi. Even in the initial period of Turkish occupation, Tughral Khan (1246-1248), at the time of his

revolt against Delhi, fled to Jajnagar, from where he allied with Rai Danuj of Sonargaon.[15] When Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-1358) was preparing to strike against Delhi for independence, he conciliated principal Hindu chiefs of his kingdom to his side.[16] The rais fought in the battle-field on the side of Ilyas Shah in his fight against Firuz Shah Tughloq of Delhi. Describing the First Battle of Ekdala (1354) Barani writes '.....standing in front of the train of that wild maniac (Ilyas Shah) together with the mouldy looking Bengali rajas', Hindu-Muslim joint army fought and repulsed the Delhi Sultan. Later those rajas were honoured with titles and rewards by the Bengal sultan. Same strategy of alliance was adopted by Firuz Shah Tughloq also in his Bengal expedition. According to Barani, Firuz Shah reached Avadh on his way to Bengal, where 'all the rais, ranas and chiefs of Hindustan, who, before the accession of Firuz Shah had been disobedient and keeping indifferent, started towards Lakhnauti willingly and gladly with their cavalry and infantry following the Exalted Banner, the rajas of Gorokhpur and Kharosa paid respect to the Sultan 'with valuable gifts and presents and kissed the dust of the court'. They, in turn, 'received umbrella, crown, ornamented robes and saddled horses'. The rajas caused to reach to the Treasury of the Army of the Sultan several lakhs of silver coins as arrrear of the past years, and for further years to come, they agreed to pay a fixed tribute, and in turn, were appointed collectors of revenue on behalf of the Sultan.[17] Firuz Shah, on the other hand, gave out a farman ordering the army not to plunder any area in control of the rajas. On the way back, the rajas who had joined the Sultan in his Bengal expedition, were permitted to return to their own territories without any trouble. Afif confirms Barani in these details.[18]

The above mentioned facts indicate the working of vassalage or tributary system operative in the mid 14th century. This still was generally applicable to territorial chieftains, those rajas who had large areas like Kamrup, Nepal, Trihut/Mithila, Tripura, Gorokhpur, Champaran, etc. Another type of petty landholders are frequently present in the extensive Gazi Traditions which is a special source available in Bengal. The 'bhuians;/bhoumika/rajas Parashurama, Gauragovinda, Bhudev Nripati, Man Nriprati, etc., belonged to a lesser

category of landholders, who might not have been included in the official vassalage system. In the 13th and 14th centuries they had armed encounters with the ghazis or warrior sufis on colonization and proselytisation. The position of the petty chiefs relating land, in the time of Turkish penetration into rural Bengal, is not easy to determine. Within hundred years of Turkish conquest many ghazis went into the interior of Bengal. Turkish military adventurists from outside Bengal, many of whom hailed from outside India, found an easy outlet for conquest and colonization in rural areas.[19] During this period many foreign military adventurists entered the Khalji army, but they were not always officially absorbed and paid. It is a possibility that some of the ghazis flourished from the groups of irregular and unofficial military adventurists.[20]

From the 13th century to the 15th century, through these warrior-sufis Islam entered into rural Bengal. Particularly, during the rule of the House of Balban (1286-1328), Islam made a speedy progress in the rural areas through the ghazis; by their effort and enterprise a systematic colonization started in the villages. In the power struggle for the Delhi Sultanate the Balbanis (1265-1287) were ousted by the Khaljis (1290-1320). But in Bengal the House of Balban, initiated by Balban's second son Bughra Khan, (1283-1287/1291), remained in power upto 1328. The Balbanis of Bengal did not have much scope for either military expansion or extension of political influence westward in apprehension of armed conflict with the Khaljis of Delhi. In course of events they concentrated their whole energy and resources within the limit of the Turkish occupied territories in Bengal, subduing lesser local chiefs, who, till then, were holding on their own against the expanding Turkish arms in the east. Under the House of Balban Turkish arms and Islam spread in different directions in Bengal by the warrior turned preacher ghazi-pirs.[21]

The conflict between the local lesser chiefs and the ghazis and their victory and defeat gave rise to multitude of legends interwoven with miracle and history that later (16th and 17th centuries) found ready favour with rural masses in the form of Jungnama. In the 14th century, the areas which the ghazis usually entered first time were outside the pale of Turkish domination; so that in these areas the

ideological theme of 'jihad' was applied to transform to dar-ul Islam. Their method of entry was very simple : (i) generally they entered the villages held by Hindu landlords with a considerable number of followers; (ii) either they took the opportunity of the discontent of the cast-oppressed local poor and rally their support against local landlord; or (iii) on the plea of the previously converted/settled Muslims being oppressed; (iv) or both. The ghazis inevitably confronted with the local chiefs, if victorious, they settled down with followers and supporters and spread Islam among the rural poor, if defeated and killed, they became martyrs for the cause of Islam. Sometimes in the lifetime, often posthumously, they were declared 'pir' by their successors and followers. Very large number of mazars/tombs, small and simple, dedicated to the memories of ghazi-shahids and ghazi pirs, scattered in the villages all over Bengal, stand witness to innumerable legends and traditions till today. Sir J. N. Sarkar opines that the ghazis were forerunners who brought down military intervention of Turkish governments for occupation of rural Bengal. Both in the tradition and in the hagiological sources there are examples of ghazis who were generals and army captains of the Turkish Sultanate.[22]

It is more or less clear from the sources, from court histories to ghazi legends, that the position and status of the old local aristocracy was subverted, but they were not eliminated as a social group. They lost their status of semi-independent rural chiefs and gradually turned into revenue contractors and collectors of the Turkish government. With emergence of a new Hindu intermediary class, the socio-economic status of the local controllers of land had been superceded. It is not unlikely that many of these higher status families were brahman by caste. By Islamisation of polity, which might have induced the rise of a non-brahman intermediary class, the control over land passed out of the hands of the older caste aristocracy.

In pre-Turkish occupation period, through land-grants frequent subinfeudation led to unequal distribution of land and power, and thus created some social groups which did not quite agree with the traditional four fold 'varna' system. The kshtriya group in the varna hierarchy is conspicuously absent in Bengal. From the 12th century

a significant change in the pattern of landownership was gradually emerging when some non-agricultural groups figured prominently in the control of land. Rise of these landowning groups indicates a greater share of authority between brahman and non-brahman caste groups, increasing social mobility, as opposed to the dominance of brahmans and the ruling elite.[23] This trend was to be reflected in the emergence of a Hindu intermediary class in the next phase of Bengal's social history.

In the Sena polity constant transfer of land, and with it variations in revenue, made by the rajas and samantas to the temples, priests, brahmans or to any other donee/s, made it necessary for the posts of scribes and account- keepers who generally belonged to the kayastha community in Bengal. A large number of writers and record-keepers had to be employed by the government to draft and maintain records of land, revenue and grants. This profession was followed by a class of writers who were known by various terms, e.g., karana, lipika, karanika, lekhaka, chitragupta, adhikari and kayastha.[24] In the beginning, the kayasthas formed only a section of the scribe community. But in course of time all record-keepers and accountants came to be known as kayastha or karana kayasthas. They were usually recruited from the educated members of the higher varnas. After a considerable increase in number this group deviated from social dependence on parent varnas and confined their societal contact within the emergent community. Their main strength was that they combined the practical experience of the kshtriyas in administrative functions with the education of the brahmans. They finally emerged as one of the 'jatis' by themselves.[25] The rise of the kayasthas as a professional literati caste undermined the monopoly of the brahmans, to a great extent, as the only educated class in the society. The presence of the kayasthas as a professional group with secular education, in the society, is as old as in the Gupta period when in the epigraphic sources they have been mentioned, as 'lipika' and 'adhikari' - the writer class and the government functionaries. Later, in the period under study, the kayasthas are available in the sources as a new service elite in the Bengal sultanate.[26]

The same phenomenon in the social grouping is evident in other

parts of India, may be with some local variations. The khatris in the Punjab and in the Delhi regions formed an important social group as early as in the 14th century. They were employed in the revenue departments for their proficiency in accountancy and land revenue regulations. They were sent to the provinces, with walis, as finance officers. There are instances of khatri diwans in the time of Muhammad Shah II (1391-1392). They maintained their influence through the courts of Gujrat, Malwa and Bengal. The revenue department in Delhi was heavily manned by khatri officers; they supervised revenue administration at the centre and the provinces from the time of the Khaljis to the Lodi rule. Babur was surprised to see that all revenue officials in the Sultanate were Hindu. Domination of Hindu officers over the revenue administration as a whole caused resentment among Muslim landgrantees, for, they were not expected to show any leniency in collecting state revenue at the time of harvest. For this reason Abd'ul Quddus Gangohi, a prominent Chishti sufi of the time, suggests in a letter to Babur that Hindus should not be entrusted with the work of collecting revenue for the government. Much earlier in Bengal, a famous sufi, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, who had great influence on Ghyasuddin Azam Shah (1391-1410) writes in a letter to the sultan that non-believers should not be given superior posts in the government.[27] The same process is apparent in the posts of 'desai' 'patil', 'desmukh', etc., in other parts of India.

14th century witnessed the completion of the process of subversion of the old rural aristocracy, and simultaneously a process of its transformation into a new intermediary class which was also evident in the society. For the sultanate ruling class emergence of intermediary groups was imperative for its own appropriation of a large amount of agricultural surplus in the form of land revenue, kharaj. In the emerging intermediary class some elements of the old rural aristocracy had to be absorbed; the 'chaudhuri' was the foremost representative of this class. He is not mentioned in the Persian sources, nor any inscription of the pre-14th century informs about 'chaudhuri' being at the top of the rural hierarchy answerable to the authorities for collection of land revenue. Ibn Batuta poins out that on a cluster of hundred villages (sadi) there was one chaudhuri, 'chief

of the infidels' in the district, and one 'mutasarif', an official for collection of taxes. By the mid-14th century the basic formation of revenue unit came to be known as 'parganah'; this term was recognized in the documents of the late sultanate period. By the 16th century 'chaudhuri' had become the hereditary zaminder held answerable to the central authority for the collection of revenue in each parganah. The descendants of the chiefs who held control of village units, like the rais and ranas, might have largely reappeared as chaudhuris, shorn of their political and military authority, but still forming a part of the rural aristocracy and having a share in the revenue.[28]

The rise of the indigenous intermediary class was mainly due to transformation in Bengal polity by Turkish occupation, at the same time the inner dynamics of the society worked along with it. Since the advent of the Ilyas Shahis (1342-1415) as the first independent dynastic monarchy, the policy of employing Hindus in the administration was consistently followed by the Turkish sultans. Community of political and economic interest was gradually asserting its inevitable superiority over the difference of faith and culture. The general political scenario, particularly in the north-Indian context had already changed. Even forty years before Timur's invasion (1398) and the sack of Delhi, Bengal had declared independence from the central sultanate in India. But subsequent to the dissolution of Delhi sultanate (1398) the socio-political scenario was drastically changed in all the provincial kingdoms. Enjoying independence and autonomous status the local rulers took keen interest in the economic development in the regions under their control and cemented their relation with local people by various means. With the severance of ties with Delhi Sultanate, for the meager presence of immigrant soldiers and officers, the early Bengal sultans started requisitioning the services of Hindus, which promoted a favourable approach to political solidarity between the two communities. This factor was particularly proved effective on the face of invasions from Delhi.

With the commencement of an independent sultanate (1338), the administrative machinery had to be expanded out of the necessity of ruling over a large area under a centralized government. All

connections with the Delhi sultanate was cut off by the Ilyas Shahis after the last invasion of Bengal by Firuz Shah Tughloq in 1358; in this situation migration of north Indian (also foreign) Muslims to Bengal must have come virtually to a halt. Due to the drying up of the source of north Indian Muslim officers, local Hindus were taken in larger number to administrative posts. The advantage of building up a local nobility and bureaucracy, loyally attached to the Bengal sultanate, was strongly realized. With the gradual transfer of tributary areas to iqtas, imposition and collection of kharaj on and from rural areas necessitated the formation of an well-organized revenue department. Due to various practical problems revenue administration had to be continued through qualified and experienced Hindu officers in the same way as it had been in the pre-Muslim conquest period. For lack of royal patronage brahman landholder families who had flourished by land grants from the Senas and others were losing control over land and revenue; on the other hand, non-brahman, but high caste groups, with traditional experience in revenue system, became more influential and prominent by getting integrated into the Sultanate administration. The kayasthas and the vaidyas should be considered in this special context to explain their emergence as new power groups in the society.

The kayasthas, having a long tradition of professionalism in revenue matters, took this opportunity to get employment in the Sultani administration. It is to be noted here that they were not only educated but were one of the very few who had non-shashtriya secular education, i.e., in accounts and land regulations, necessary for administrative purposes; brahman groups, on the other hand, having exclusively traditional shastriya education and for reasons of caste superiority, were not ready to accept jobs and patronage of the Turkish government in the initial stage. But with the altered circumstances they also changed their attitude towards the Bengal Sultanate; in the Mahmud Shahi (1442-1486) and Hussain Shahi (1493-1538) periods they accepted jobs and patronage from Sultans. The vaidyas, an intermediate subcaste, physicians by profession, had the same advantage of having non-shashtriya professional education similar to the kayasthas, also accepted employment in the Sultani

administration.[26] In the Pala inscriptions there are several references to karanas, but no mention about vaidyas and ambashthas. Brihaddharma Purana refers to vaidyas as a separate caste. In Brahmavaivarta Purana vaidya and ambashtha have been regarded as two separate jatis. According to mythology vaidyas were created by the union between Asvini Kumars <sons of the Sungod> and a brahman woman; but the ambashthas were created by brahman father and vaishya mother <Brahmavaivartapurana>. Bharat Mallik, the famous vaidya kulajikar <17th century> for the first time declared that the vaidyas and ambashthas are one and same. In the Sultani period the vaidyas are found to have enjoyed high position by serving the sultans as their personal physicians; they definitely belonged to the higher status Hindu groups.

The tradition of employing Hindus in general and kayasthas in particular in revenue department paved the way for the emergence of an intermediary class who acted as revenue officers and tax collectors of the government and later became revenue contractors, finally, from the time of the Mahmud Shahis <1436-'86> in the second half of the 15th century, acquired zamindari rights[27]. They were granted land as reward for their competence in revenue matters and received titles for loyal services to the Sultanate[28]. It is a possibility that some of the sultans deliberately adopted the policy to promote kayasthas and vaidyas against orthodox brahman groups who were generally opposed to the rule of the 'yavanas'. From the time of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah<1459-1474> names of Hindu officers are referred to by the celebrated poet of the Ramayana, Krittibas. He named four of the Hindu officers including Narayandas, the personal physician of the sultan and of the treasurer, Gandharva Khan.

The family of poet Maladhar Bosu <author of Srikrishna Vijay> and his son Lakshmi Kanta Bosu of Kulingrama (in present Burdwan district of West Bengal) served the Sultani government from the time of the Mahmud Shahis to the rule of the Hussain Shahis.[29] The father and the son received titles of 'Gunaraj Khan' and Satyaraj Khan' respectively and were granted land. The family of Ishan Khan of Mahimpur (in 24 parganas) became eminent in Rahr society by rendering commendable service to the government. Ishan Khan held

high post in the revenue department under the Ilyas Shahis and his son Gopinath Bosu, became revenue minister/wazir of sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah (1418-1431); he was awarded the title of 'Purandar Khan'. His elder brother Govinda Bosu was in charge of the Royal Treasury; their younger brother Sundarbar Khan (title) was also an important government officer. Gopinath Bosu's son Keshava Khan held the post of Chhatrinazir/captain of the Royal Body Guards, the most trusted officer in charge of the personal security of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519).[30] Anup, Darogah-i-Taksal/ Inspector of Mints, Gaur Mallik, Sipah-salar/commander of the Army, Ananta and Mukunda Sen, Raj Vaidya/royal physicians ('antaranga' in Bengali) of Alauddin Hussain Shah, and many such important officers belonged to the kayastha and vaidya communities. Son-in law of Ramchandra Khan was granted the zamindari of Chhatrabhog by a Muslim administrator, adhikari of Gaur.[31]

Although initiated in the mid-14th century by the Ilyas Shahis, the process of acculturation was further accelerated by the Mahmud Shahis (1436-'86) who adopted a non-community based policy in the administration, thus continued the legacy of the Ilyas Shahis. The rulers depended on the regional patriotism for countering the imperialist designs of north Indian powers like Delhi and Jaunpur (the Sharqi Kingdom). Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474) not only appointed Hindus in important posts, but also extended patronization to brahman scholars in his court[32]. But at the end of the Mahmud Shahi rule increasing influence of the Abyssinians upset the balance among different groups in the nobility, and as a consequence they captured power from 1486-1493. Bengal passed through political uncertainty, chaos and turmoil for the next seven years.

From the late 15th century to the early 16th century, under the Hussian Shahis, a consistently more syncretic policy was followed in the polity by appointments to Hindus and patronization of local culture. Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) restored Bengal from Abyssinian misrule in 1493. With strong support from a composite nobility he succeeded in eliminating the Abyssinian influence from Bengal's political scenario. Among other Hindus in high official posts the name

of Ananta Sen <personal physician to the Sultan> Kedar Ray (representative in Tirhut), Bhandasi Roy <commander of Ghoraghat fort> and Biswas Roy <Minister> are available. Since the Barbak Shahi period (1459-1474) the Abyssinians constituted a dominant group in the army and the administration. Their ouster created a vaccum that Hussain Shah readily filled up with local elements. Dr. M.R. Tarafdar rightly observes that 'the nobility went through a process of transformation at the hands of Alauddin Hussain Shah who sought to promote the Hindus to positions of distinction. The ruler had to depend on the nobles for their active support, and co-operation, and very often he owed his life and throne to them'.[33] In this particular context the appointment of Hindus in the key posts may be analysed. Also, Hussain Shahi Bengal was surrounded by a number of hostile neighbours like Orissa, Kamrup, Arakan and Tripura in the east. The Sharqi menace to Bengal was counteracted by the Lodis, and as soon as they were eliminated as a power factor in north Indian political scenario, the Afghan-Mughal struggle for supremacy started, and finally Mughal imperialism raised its head in Bengal. To fight the onslaughts from the north and contend the neighbouring states, the Hussain Shahis needed a strong government and internal peace. Keeping this purpose in view they sought the support of all sections of the people irrespective of their affiliation to creed and community.

Thus the upper caste Hindus were gradually transformed into a new class of urbanized service-elites. In the Hussain Shahi period the kayastha officers in the revenue department had enough resources to take lease/ijara and make contract/muqa'ata with the government for the right of collecting revenue of a particular area on annual basis. Eventually they aspired for zamindari rights on leased land. In the vacuum created by the declining older rural aristocracy, the kayasthas were emerging as a new social group, closely allied with the Sultani government in different capacities with interest in acquiring some kind of right on land. From surnames of Bengali kayasthas there is evidence of hereditisation of official designations which they used as family-names. Taking the opportunity of their being connected to land revenue collection, their designations turned hereditary, and in

the process they might have acquired zamindari rights. This particular socio-economic trend was correctly observed later by Abul Fazl (1582) when he recorded that most of the zamindars in Bengal were kayastha by caste; their social influence and economic prosperity was evident in the 16th century.[34] Poet Mukundaram in Chandimangal says that the kayasthas appealed to the founder of the newly established city of Gujarat to provide them with good residential facilities, because, they happened to be a highly educated group, and as such, were to adorn a newly founded city. M. R. Tarafdar rightly comments that 'the Sultans made significant contribution to the growth of Hindu middle class with all its economic paraphernalia'. [35]

The Sena rule witnessed increasing sanskritization in the eastern part of the Delta; status of brahmans was enhanced during this period, 'kulinism' being the main prop of social prestige. Kulin system upgraded and created a special group of brahmans whose status was based on greatly idealized qualities to put them on the highest stratum in the caste society within the brahman and kayastha folds. According to tradition, those brahmans and kayasthas who came fom outside Bengal with the motivation to purify the caste society, they were given special status to keep them separate from the locals. Brahman society itself gradually became hierarchical and stratified. The Nabashakhs <gandhabanik, shankhabanik, kansabanik, tambuli,sadgope, tantubaya, modak, tili, barui, karmakar, kumbhakar, etc.> were allowed to acquire the right to offer food and water <jalchal> to brahmans. Among the Nabashakhs, the mahishyas <agriculturists> were not given the right to be attended by shuddha/ pure brahmans. The brahman priests who attended them came from the local elements; they did not have the ability to read the Vedas, to teach the shashtras or to be engaged in priestly profession to serve the brahmans in the highest order of the society. Chandra king of south east Bengal, Srichandra donated land and settled six thousand of this class of brahmans. Many of these brahmans took to the profession of agriculture. The general social trend in the post-1200 Bengal society was the sharp decline of the brahman groups from the elevated social status and economic privileges they enjoyed under the Sena dynasty. They lost the advantage of having royal patronage

through land-grants, and also by other forms. They reacted sharply against the changing order of the society under Turkish domination. It has already been discussed in detail how with the diminishing political authority of the Senas in the late 12th century and early 13th century, the character of land grants changed and became more individual based, and consequently, smaller in size, economically leading to more fragmentation and socially to more personal domination on land. But with the foundation of Turkish rule these socio-economic factors were bound to change.

Brahman society was divided within by many subgroups manifesting varied socio-economic levels. Not all the groups enjoyed same type of social privileges, but generally, of course, their status in the caste society was the highest. In post-1200 period, under Turkish rule, their hold over land was gradually diminishing. In the first hundred and fifty years of Turkish invasion and military expansion, they lost court patronage and other caste privileges associated with it. To preserve their caste identity they isolated themselves from the rest of the society. They were somehow able to retain their status till the late 13th century, in the limited sphere of the Hindu power pockets, guarded by the later Senas and the Devas. But it has already been stated how non-brahman educated and influencial caste-groups allied themselves with the government in various ways since the early days of Turkish occupation in Bengal. As a result, control over land and other related social benefits were transferred into the hands of non-brahman intermediary groups associated with the power-structure, in different capacities, particularly through revenue administration.

Initial reaction of the orthodox brahman groups towards Turkish rule was highly negative. They tried, by all means, to preserve and protect the social and economic privileges they enjoyed in pre-Turkish conquest times. Navya Smritikaras of Bengal made an all-out effort to reverse and revitalize the process. To serve the purpose, the orthodox brahman groups took a few steps : (i) to preserve the basic order of caste hierarchy they imposed through 'smriti anusasana', most rigid caste rules operative specially on higher status Hindu groups; (ii) immense importance was given to the profession of

teaching through Sanskrit, the knowledge of which had always been a monopoly of the learned brahmans; by having this right they were not only socially privileged but also financially benefited. Thus they could retain the ideological hold over the educated class and also accelerate the process of 'sanskritisation' of the society. This is quite evident in the social life of Nabadwip-Santipur area as reflected in the Vaishnava biographical literature of the early 16th century.[37] The brahmans of this area were largely dependent on teaching profession and financially they were not badly off at all; (iii) various prohibition and taboos were imposed in such a way that the brahmans could not leave their caste professions without being fallen (patita) from their varna status.

Despite taking all these protective steps, the homogeneity of the brahman society could not be easily sustained. From the time of the rule of the family of Raja Ganesh (1415-1436) some brahman families gave up their resistance to Turkish rule. The inner conflict in the brahman society was evident in the opposition of the orthodox groups to Sri Chaitanya and his movement; and also Vaishnav reaction to sanatan dharmis/orthodox groups, when they sought intervention from local qazis against the Vaishanavs.[38] It is a possibility that over a long period the brahmans lost control on land which obviously could have led them to grave financial crisis; they might have also been inspired by the examples set by the non-brahman caste-groups, like the kayasthas and the vaidyas, who enhanced their resources and prestige in the society by serving the Sultani government. Mahmud Shahi Sultans (1436-1486), like Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474), patronized and honoured brahman pundits like Visharad, Raimukut, Krittibasa Ojha, etc.[37] Internal peace could lead to social harmony which created a congenial atmosphere where vernacular literature flourished gloriously. Of the Bengali poets of the period Yashoraj Khan, Kavindra Parameshwar, Srikar Nandi and Sridhara received court patronage. Under the Hussain Shahis (1493-1538) the brahmans held highest of government posts and offices. Hussain Shah's chief minister Sanatan Goswami's prosperity was legendary-where ever he moved a thousand horses followed him; his treasure worth twenty-two lakhs of gold (mohar) was hidden under the earth

at some place in the city of Gaur.[39] Once Sanatan was put under arrest by the Sultan's order for his refusal to accompany him (Hussain Shah) in the forth-coming Orissa expedition. Sanatan bribed the Muslim jailor with seven thousand silver coins (mudra) for making arrangement for his escape from prison. Many of the members of this powerful brahman family, brothers Rup and Sanatan, Raghunandan and Anup, brother-in law Srikanta, held the highest of administrative posts in Alauddin Hussain Shah's government.[40] Resistance towards Turkish rule had gradually subsided with time and liberal sultans were accepted as rulers of people even by the high caste educated class including many of the brahmans.

Hindu civil servants and officers were culturally influenced by Turkish social manners, custom, dress and language. At the end of the 15th century Bipradas Piplai (1495-1496), a brahman poet writing in vernacular, noticed Islamic influence on the society when he comments that the Hindus were being taught 'mussalmani' by receiving 'kalima' (from the Muslims)[41]. Jayananda, a 16th century poet, regrets the prevalence of Islamic influence on the contemporary Hindu society and predicts that as a result of it the brahmans would co-habitate with low-caste shudra women, (their) daughters would become conversant with Islamic affairs, those brahmans would keep beard and read'Farsi', put on leather shoes and hold stick in their hands; the priests would perform their duty by reciting from the 'masnavi'; the mlechhas would become the rulers and the shudras the religious leaders of the world.[42] In the early decades of the 16th century, Jagai and Madhai, the two notorious brahman brothers of Nabadwip, who happened to be the Kotwali officers of the government, ate beef, drank alcohol and used to read out from the 'masnavi.'[43] Two social aspects are clear from Jayananda's long lamentation; (i) apprehension of the brahmans becoming Islamised, and (ii) the fear of the shudras getting some kind of social equality in a Muslim ruled state.

Hindu bureaucrats and zamindars took to Muslim dress, although they always put on sandalwoodpaste 'tilak' mark on the forehead to keep their community identity apparent. Hindu zamindars held their 'sabha' imitating Turkish, 'darbari' styles. The culminating point of this trend is noticed in the 18th century, when, in the darbar of

Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia, costumes, custom, language and official designations of court officers, all were thoroughly Islamised.[43] By the 16th century, it is no more valid to say that only the non-brahman groups participated in the Sultani administration; some of the brahman groups also gave up their stiff resistance to Turkish domination by accepting government jobs and other types of social opportunities.

The continuity and change in the Hindu society were not only dependent on outside factors like Turkish political domination and conversion, these were also the fall-out of its own inner dynamics. General feeling of the orthodox brahman groups was that the Muslim rule was responsible for all their misery, and particularly for the erosion of social values. Smritikaras prepared a detailed ideological framework to protect the Hindu caste society from the effects of Islamisation. A new set of rules in the 'navya smriti' was included to counteract any idea or action which could precipitate the subversion of sanatan-dharma. Shulapani (late 14th centrury), Brihaspati Mishra (15th century), Raghunath (late 15th century) - all were in favour of imposing most stringent caste rules on the society.[44] Raghunandan was probably the most famous and influential Smartya pundit of 16th century Bengal. In framing his socio-legal regulations he made a last effort to preserve and maintain the privileged position and status of the brahmans in the society. His prescriptions are actuated by the clear motive to preserve the purity and integrity of all caste groups in general and the brahmans in particular. In the contemporary Smriti literature there was a general prescription to place the brahmans on equal status with gods; Raghunandan points out that a shudra at the most could enjoy the limited fruits of dharma only by worshipping and serving gods and brahmans.[45] Thus it is obvious that his major concern was to tackle the shudras properly on societal level. He was the one who forbade the brahmans and other high castes to go on sea voyage, so that they could not leave their caste-professions, teaching, priesthod and astrology and go for the lucrative professionof trading to make money through it. In those days a large part of trade had passed into the hands of foreign merchants; there was every chance of coming into contact with them if trading was taken up as

profession. Thus high caste Hindus were indirectly threatened by Raghunandan's injuctions of being fallen from caste society by mlechha and yavana contacts. He conceptually divided Bengal society into just two camps, at one end was the brahmans and on the other end the shudras According to this rule all non-brahmans were to be regarded as shudra. This ideological postulation did not succeed in all aspect.

Frequent use of the idea of 'kaliyuga' as the age of crisis is quite an early phenomenon in Bengal. It has been stated in the Premvilasa (much later source) that due to yavana occupation, in kaliyuga people would violate all social norms; rigid caste regulations should be imposed to rule out any possibility of mlechha influence on the society.[46] These recommendations in favor of more rigidity in caste society indicate the insecurity within the orthodox sections. That the social changes were taking place even within high castes had to be taken into consideration by the lawgivers. The uncompromising nature of early Smritis in Bengal failed to cope with the reality of social changes in the contemporary society. Even Raghunandan in his later works, had to relax the regulations regarding the fixation of the professions of Bengali brahmans, their contact with shudras and age-limit for marriageable girls. He quotes from Manusmriti in support of his changed views that the brahmanas, if hard-pressed by poverty, could adopt any means of livelihood.[47] This is a clear indication of (i) the financial crisis of orthodox brahmans in general generated by lack of patronage of the ruling class; (ii) among the high-castes even brahmans were ready to accept government jobs without paying any heed to the fall-out of mlechha contact. But ultimately the attitude to accommodation did not go too far; the rules regarding pollution/'dosh' in day-to-day life remained extremely rigid-the idea of purity and impurity, edibles and non-edibles, etc. The severest of all regulations were framed against and applied to women, who were intended to be subjected to unlimited suppression. Social pollution through them, by shudra and mlechha contact, was considered to be the most dreaded factor in caste society. The Smartya legal system, relating code of conduct for women, inheritance, succession, any property right for them was not allowed and all rules were targeted to marginalize and

eliminate them. The two most apparent factors - pollution through food and contact of women with base people (shudra and mlechha) were made the most important sources for destruction of caste and consequent fall from the society.

The elaborate and idealistic social regulations legalized in the Smriti literature were not followed word by word by all high caste groups. Presence of Tantric elements in the brahmanfold, and worship of non-Aryan local deities in Bengali culture, mainifest factors other than the orthodox ideology. A group of reformists is present in the caste-groups of the 15th century which was in favor of some kind of compromise with the social changes arising out of Turkish domination in the society and polity. According to the kulakarikas/family traditions, a defensive reform movement was led by one Dutta Khan (Khas/ Dutta/kayastha) who happened to be an officer in the government of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I (1442-1458). For discussion and solution of problems created by 'yavanadosha', he set up a caste-court/'jatimala kachheri'. In the 57th session of the court twentyfive reasons for the decline of 'kulinism'were detected and a strong determination to keep unity among brahmans and other high-castes was expressed. Udayanacharya Bhaduri (Varendra brahman leader from north Bengal) devised the system of 'pati-bandhana'/ bond between families suffering from same faults/'dosh', a novel way of regrouping to facilitate interdining, intermarriage and other crucial social exchanges. Debibar Ghatak (1480) introduced the same system applicable to Rahri (West Bengali) brahmans who were grouped together by fault into thirty-six subgroups/'mel-bandhana'. Bhairava Ghataki, Hari Majumdari and Dehata 'mels' were created to counteract yavanadosha/pollution by Muslim contact.[48]

Nagendra Nath Bosu, a modern compiler of Kulaji literature, is of opinion that 'yavanadosha' was a common factor in all the caste-groups determined by faults in 'mels' and 'patis'. The main purpose of this reform movement was to save the brahman families, who were polluted by different impurities according to Smriti regulations, leading to inevitable fall from caste-society. Both Paramananda Bosu and Paramananda Roy introduced the same type of subgrouping system in the kayasthafold. There was also an important provision

introduced by 'prayaschitta' or atonation for sin. Adbhutacharya, although a much later writer, quotes from earlier sources by pointing out that if some one's 'jati' was destroyed, being forced or cheated by a Muslim to take impure food, even then he could get back his jati by 'prayaschitta', which, apart from atonation for sin, included paying the brahman priest in cash or kind or both.[49]

There were other sections in the brahmanfold who tended to start different type of reforms, although in a much later period (16th to 17th centuries). Those brahman families who were directly 'polluted' by 'yavandosh' like interdinning or contact through women, created their own subgroups, names of which are significant i.e., Pir-Ali, Sher-Khani, Srimantakhani, etc., by which they avoided direct conversion to Islam. They were looked down upon by the mainstream brahman groups and subgroups; even the priests who served those families were not considered as pure brahmans. Orthodox brahmans never gave up and continued their resistance to any reform or change minimizing their domination. For instance, Noolo Panchanan was very much against Debibar Ghatak's reform by 'mel-bandhana'. He asked his followers to go back to the earlier Smriti regulations and restore 'sanatan-dharma' in its full purity and glory.[50] Even before the advent of Sri Chaitanya (late 15th century) a struggle between the reformists and the orthodox sections is evident in the caste society. Thus a defence mechanism was working within the society for a long time. Most of the reforms were limited only in the brahmanfold, imitated at the most, by the kayasthas, in which inclusion of low-castes was not considered even by imagination. In the early 16th century Gaudiya Vaishnava reform movement was started by brahman leadership, but at least ideologically, they accepted the possibilities of including low-castes.

Thus it is noted that an upheaval among the high-cast groups in the society was created by the impact of Islamisation in Bengal. As a result, new subgroups were emerging out of the orthodoxfold to accommodate themselves with the changing patterns in the society and the polity. Their reaction to the Turkish rule and interaction with Muslim society was largely dependent on their social and economic level. Despite the continued rigidity of the caste system, from the

15th century onwards, a kind of social mobility is evident in the higher status Hindu groups.

It has already been observed that the rise of a prosperous and influential Hindu intermediary class was closely related to Turkish rule and its impact on Bengal society was far and wide. This class, in the later period, was very much allied with the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement; the refuge in an ideological and social movement was a necessity for their social security. In the late 15th century the neo-Vaishnavite movement was initiated as a socio-religious reformism, the main purpose of which was to bring about a qualitative change in the contemporary decadent Hindu society. The essential features of Bhakti movement, which spread in other parts of India, were also present in the Gaudiya Vaishnavism - rejection of ritualism, opposition to priestly class and orthodox groups, disapproval of caste system and other inequalities, and inclusion of outcastes, low castes, women and other socially oppressed sections in the program of 'salvation of the fallen'/'patitoddhar'.

The Gaudiya Vaishnava reform movement, inspired by Sri Chaitanya in the early phase, unleashed new forces in the social, cultural and religious life in Bengal. As the movement passed through certain stages of evolution, some new forces underwent a corresponding change in character. In 1509 Biswambhar Mishra (later Sri Chaitanya) a brilliant young scholar of Nabadwip, accepted the leadership of the movement offered by the senior Vaishnava leaders, like Advaita Acharya, Srivasa Acharya, Yavana Haridasa and Nityananda, who had already been concerned about the necessity of some kind of reform for the Hindu society. The populist character of the movement in the early phase is expressed through acceptance of simple and direct principles and easy method of propagation- anybody could achieve moral elevation and or salvation by chanting the name of Krishna/Hari. The leaders in this phase, at least ideally, wanted to include all sections of people cutting across the barriers of caste and creed.

Sri Chaitanya was born in 1486 in the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah (1481-1486), immediately after which political power was usurped by the Abyssinians for the next seven years (1486-1493).

Later years of the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah was marred by political uncertainty and instability. The ruling class itself was passing through a period of crisis. Both Jayananda and Vrindabandas write that there was a widespread rumour at the birth of Chaitanya that a brahman king would sit on the throne of Gaur.[51] It is a possibility that the rumour might have reached, through the local Muslim officers, to the capital where it could have created some flutter, because, exactly seventy years before (1415-16) there was a temporary seizure of political power by Raja Ganesh, a brahman nobleman from north Bengal. This may explain the frictions between the local Muslim officers, mulukpatis and qazis, and the Vaishnava leaders, including Sri Chaitanya himself, particularly on public congregations with devotional singing/nagarsankirtan.

By the time Sri Chaitanya was leading the reform movement in Nabadwip (1509) Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) had come to the throne of Bengal by ousting the Abyssinians from power; gradually internal peace and order came back. There was no possibility of direct confrontation between the Vaishnava leaders and the government. The real opposition to the reformists came from the Hindu orthodox sections. They apprehended that the traditional social norms and the caste structure would collapse by the rising influence and popularity of the neo-Vaishnava faith, for which Yavana Haridas had to face trial, punishment and imprisonment inflicted by the local Muslim authority.[52] The 'pashandis'/Tantricized brahmans also lodged complaint with the qazi against Srivas Acharya's singing devotional songs at night. But in most of the cases of conflict, finally a compromise was reached at by both the sides- the local Muslim authorities and the Vishnava leaders.[53] Hussain Shah's policy of general tolerance might have worked behind this; the Sultan ordered the local officers and qazis not to disturb Sri Chaitanya and let him practice and preach his faith in peace.

How and why the Hindu intermediary class, along with artisans, craftsmen and the small traders/'baniks' of Saptagram area supported the neoreformist movement by accepting its ideology, should be considered in the above social context. In the initial stage, the Hindu intermediary class was the most active supporter of Gaudiya

Vaishnava movement. This class, despite being rich and influential, could not enjoy social prestige in the orthodox Hindu society because of their connection with the Turkish government.

The declared objective of Sri Chaitanya's movement was to include all sections of the society into its fold. The social stigma of mlechha contact by accepting government jobs, land and other patronages, suffered by this class, could be undermined by joining Vaishnava movement. To this otherwise powerful class Gaudiya Vaishnavism was an alternate social ideology based on reformed religious ideals and principles. Almost all the important Hindu officers of Alauddin Hussain Shah were great supporters and believers of Sri Chaitanya's movement. Sri Chaitanya accepted this powerful social group because they could not operate freely in the 'sanatan'/orthodox Hindu Society. Hussain Shah's two most important ministers, Rup and Sanatan, the Goswami brothers, openly admitted to Sri Chaitanya, with 'a sense of deep shame', that they did 'mean service' (job in Muslim government), mixed with base people, for working under the mlechhas all their companions were mlechhas and they used to come into contact with people (Muslims) who were opponents of the brahman and the holy cow. Chaitanya immediately accepted them as Vaishnavs with the promise of final salvation.[54] Subuddhi Roy, a big zaminder, and one time patron of Hussain Shah, before he came to power, lost his caste in a conflict with the sultan, although he still continued as an important government official. He desperately sought the advice of the pundits of Varanasi for the method of atonation/ prayaschitta for the recovery to caste society when he was asked to commit suicide by gulping down boiling ghee/clarified butter, which was considered as the only way to salvation (after death).Frightened Subuddhi Roy took refuge at the feet of Sri Chaitanya who advised him simply to chant the name of 'Hari' for salvation, which obviously was a better choice for Roy.[55] Raghunath Das was the son of an ijaradar of the Turkish government; he was an important kayastha disciple of Sri Chaitanya. Chaitanya gave him 'salagrama shila' (stone symbol of god Narayana), which right was an absolute monopoly of the brahmans, and ordered his brahman disciples to accept 'mantra diksha' from Raghunath. It is quite clear from the above mentioned

facts that even in upper status groups, those under caste onslaught by the orthodox society, were opting out in favor of Vaishnava reformism.

There is no evidence in the sources to claim that the Turkish rulers resisted or disturbed the Vaishnava leaders from practicing or propagating their faith which turned out to be the most important socio-cultural movement of the time. Resistance held out by local Muslim officers could hardly be described as communal in nature. There is no evidence that the Gaur government received any information about petty frictions which were locally settled. But Alauddin Hussain Shah was fully aware that many of his Hindu officers and ministers were staunch supporters of Vaishnava reformists. The Sultan ordered the arrest of his prime-minister/ mahamantri Sanatan for refusal to join him in Orissa expedition; Sanatan non-cooperated on the suspicion that the invading army might destroy idols and temples there.[56] Both Rup and Sanatan had already decided to leave the Gaur government and join Sri Chaitanya. The Sultan suspected it and kept Sanatan under vigilance. It could not have been his concern so much whether his Hindu officers supported Vaishnava movement; but, what could have been his reaction if all Hindu officers resigned from the government to join it, is a matter of speculation, for, it did not happen in reality.

From above mentioned facts it may be inferred that there is no proof of communal discrimination in the appointment to high official posts in the government. There are some cases mentioned in contemporary literary sources where ooppressive measures were taken by local government officials, around 1515, but this did not happen in any other area except Nadia. Regarding oppression by the qazis, including forcible conversion, there are more than one references. Vijayagupta <1492> and Bipradas Piplai <1494-'95> referred to the oppression of the qazis and their attempts of conversion by force.[57] This could also be confirmed by the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa who had referred to such conversions.[58] But it is noticeable in the sources that the oppression of the qazis were mainly localized affairs happening far away from the capital city of Gaur and where the central government often did not have direct control

on local officers. Significantly the areas closer to the capital were not disturbed; there were large brahman settlements in the villages of Ramkeli and Kanainatshal within a stone's throw from Gaur. There is no instance of Hindus being converted in Nadia, Santipur, Kharda, Saptagram areas. The oft quoted instance of Kajidalan by Sri Chaitanya is referred, when on the complaint of the orthodox anti-Vaishnav brahmans the qazi of Nadia banned the public rendition of kirtan/devotional singning loudly. Chaitanya took out a procession to the house of the qazi and his followers ransacked it. The qazi finally compromised and settled the matter with the Vaishnav leader. Rajmala mentioned that the Hindu soldiers of Hussain Shah in his expedition against Triupra worshipped idols on the bank of the Gomati. There is an instance of one Ramchandra Khan who did not pay taxes; as a result he was arrested along with his family by Hussain Shah's ujir/ wazir, his village was plundered and he was forced to eat beef. Vaishnav poet Krishnadas Kaviraj admitted that Ramchandra used to perform dacoity and never paid taxes.[59]

The Vaishnava biographers and poets of the period, depicting an event, made a clear distinction between the activities of the local qazis and the policy of the sultans. Vijaygupta <1492>, after depicting the oppression by a qazi, praised sultan Jalaluddin Fatah Shah. Mukundaram fled with his Muslim cultivator from the oppression of a dihidar, Mahmud Sharif, due to the new land revenue settlement started in the wake of Mughal conquest. The appointments to Hindus were given to distant areas, border areas, etc., to spread administrative control through them.[60] We have already noticed how important Hindu families emerged as service elites and how hereditisation of designations started with the process. The long legacy of composite nobility and integration of Hindus as service elites was disrupted from the time of Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah <1519-1533> and we do not come to know anything about appointment and replacement or rise of a new family in this respect. No other officer is mentioned till 1574 when Sri Hari, Treasurer of Daud Karrani, fled to Jessore after Daud's fall.

From the late 15th century neo-Muslims and Pathans acquired control in the village community. 'Hasan-Hosen Pala' in the Mangal

kavyas was not a literary gimmick only but a definite reflection of their presence in the society. Mukundaram gave them a permanent residence in the westernside <paschimpalli> of the newly founded Gujratnagar. Their society was divided first by how they practiced their religion : 'beshara' Muslims were known as 'gola' and converted Muslims were termed as 'garsal'. The other most important divide was professionwise : jola/weaver, sanakar/'sanamaker, rangrez/dyers, darji/tailor kagozi/papermaker, kabari/fisherman, kasai/meat seller, hajam/barber, etc,. Ordinary Muslim folk who came from outside Bengal were divided into four groups- Sherani, Nohali, Kudani and Bituni. Primary division between ashraf and ajlaf has to be considered.[60] The social phenomenon of Peasantry emerging as a Muslim community has been discussed later.

4

# The Ruling Class : Development of a Composite Nobility

From the early 13th century, with the conquest of Nadia by Bakhtiyar Khalji and his followers, foreign Turkish military captains, adventurers, and soldiers from the Middle East, Central Asia, Turkey and Afghanistan started coming into Bengal. In first hundred years of Turkish occupation, immigrant military captains and officers obviously did not emerge as an organized section forming a nobility as an institution. They operated more on clan loyalty than by any class and organizational interest; they did not acquire any right either on land or on service, their recruitment and placements depended on the will of the immediate political authority. First lineament of the institution of nobility did not seem to have emerged in Bengal before the middle of the 14th century. The term 'nobility' here approximately denotes a section of politically powerful men who acquired dominance on the society as a part of the ruling class with control over certain areas <iqta> from which came the main source of their income in the form of land-tax <kharaj>. They could be identified by the very nature of their source of income, by the mode of exercise of authority, life-style and social habits, in short, their rights and responsibilities were more or less identified and determined. Responsibility of a

noble to maintain and supply soldiers and to fight on behalf of the central political authority explains his role as a military officer, which was obligatory for him in order to enjoy any right over assigned land. According to Prof. K. M. Ashraf the basis and organization of Turkish nobility in India could be divided into two major groups : the Umarah/ Ahl-i-Tegh/ the men of arms, and the Ulama/Ahl-i-qalam/ the intelligentsia. Their individual rank was decided by iqta, maratib and khitab[1]. The nobles had no other alternative but to live as loyal supporters of the sovereign, otherwise, by revolting <successfully> they could try to assume the status of independent rulers, which they frequently attempted in the early period of Turkish occupation in Bengal. In time, with consolidation of political authority, the status of the nobility declined to a hired bureaucracy in a stable and centralized power structure.

With the Turkish conquest soldiers migrated in large numbers to India- the Khaljis, Turkomans, and Ghorids formed the army of the Khwarizmians in Afghanistan during the Mongol invasions. Their defeat in 1221-1222 led to large scale migration into India. Minhaj lavishes praise on Delhi Sultan Iltumish as a provider of refuge to those who had to leave their homes due to incursions of the Mongol infidels[2]. Also, a large number of individual soldiers, dispersed by the Mongols, must have fled to India to seek suitable services there. The army of the early Delhi Sultans was composed of as a coalition of two different groups : the Turks/slaves, and also a few freed, of Turkish speech; the Tajiks/free born, of Persian speech. After Iltumish's death the conflict between the two groups in the ruling class took almost racial form to retain power, influence and control over the succession to the Delhi throne.[3] The Turks, from the initial period of their occupation in Northern India, having received patronization from Muhmmad Ghori, got the best parts of the fertile territories in the occupied regions as field of their operations. But the Khaljis were one of the lesser components of the ruling groups. Due to lack of patronage and support from the central authority, they were driven to seek remote and difficult regions in far off Bihar and Bengal. The conquest of huge territories and the necessity to consolidate their rule led the early Sultans to welcome immigrants to

India. Subsistence level living conditions in their ancestral lands also led the Khaljis and the Afghans to migrate to India. Later the sawars and petty officers rising from these clans were gradually elevated to new social groups in the Sultanate ruling class.

The immigrant Khalji nobles, who made a permanent mark in India, but were discarded and pushed out from the power centre in Delhi, were Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Bakhtiyar Khalji, Malik Muhammad Shiran Khalji, Malik Alauddin Mardan Khalji and Malik Husamuddin I'waz Khalji - all who became famous for their operations in Bengal, and all four of them made attempts to form an autonomous region under their control. Originally the Khaljis formed a recognized segment of the ruling class of the Ghor Kingdom; they contributed their share of soldiers and commanders to it. Their association with the Ghorians continued long after their arrival in India. It has been widely accepted by modern scholars that the Khaljis were Turks. About the role of the early military captains in Bengal after the Turkish conquest, an interesting passage at the beginning of Minhaj's Biographical Notice on Husamuddin I'waz Khalji, later to be Sultan of Bengal <1211-1227>, indicate that the Khaljis formed not only a military clan, but they were ordinary folk also.[4] I'waz Khalji was going to a village taking some load on an ass, when he met and fed some derivishes. He is said to have belonged to the Khaljis of Garmser of Ghor kingdom; so was Bakhtiyar Khalji. After the capture of Ghazni Muizuddin Muhammad Sam began to organize expeditions into India, when his army consisted largely of the Ghorians and the Khaljis, and major appointments went to the Ghorian notables. After the second battle of Tarain <1192> the situation changed considerably. Except for the Khalji capture of Bihar and Bengal, the Ghorian commanders seem increasingly to play a secondary role in further conquests. Most of these took place under Qutbuddin Aibak, the Turkish slave of Muizuddin Sam/Muhammad Ghori. So long as the troops were largely of non-Turkish origin, it would still be possible for power to pass into the hands of non-Turkish military men. The Khalji conquerors of Bengal provided an illustration of how the possibility could become a reality.

Bakhtiyar Khalji came from amongst the tribes of Ghor and

Garmser to enrol as a soldier at Ghazni. On being rejected by the officials of the diwan-i-arz/inspection department there, he came to Delhi, to be again similarly rejected. He then sought employment with the muqti of Badaun, who assigned him mawajib/salary. From there he went to Awadh, having by now acquired horses and weapons. After he rendered good service, he was assigned two places in iqta.[5] As the report of his success in exploits spread, 'all the Khalj from Hindustan' joined him.[6] Persons like Husamuddin I'waz even came from Khalji homeland to take service with him. With an army so collected and consisting practically entirely of Khaljis, he conquered Bihar and Bengal. After the fiasco of Tibet expedition when he came back to Devkote, the families of the dead Khalji soldiers and captains he had left behind allegedly cursed and blamed him.[7] Thus it may be inferred from this reference that large number of Khalji's even with families were present in Bengal and Bihar at the earliest of Turkish invasion. About the Khalji domination of Bengal Prof. Irfan Habib says that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji 'conquered Bihar and Bengal, which he ruled in the capacity of an autonomous potentate'.[8] He thus created a separate Khalji dominion till 1227 which declined with the rise of Iltutmish. The other immigrant group was the Abyssinians, Qutbuddin Aibak sent the Abyssinian muqti of Awadh to punish the recalcitrant Khalji nobles of Bengal. They came into prominence in the reign of Sultan Raziya and their influence waned due to changed political situation in northern India. The Afghans also migrated to India due to hardship faced in day today life in their homeland. Unlike the Khaljis the tribal Afghan immigrants took longer time to gain positions of influence and authority in the Sultanate ruling class.[9]

The nobility as an institution was organized and reorganized over and again during the Sultanate period of Indian history. Despite the fact that often than not tribal and racial considerations played as a cementing force within the institution, that early phenomenon was replaced gradually by loyalty to the immediate sovereign. The nobility as a group has been classified in various ways : (i) noble by birth (ii) nobles created by royal prerogative (iii) nobles integrated from communities other than Muslim etc. But finally it emerged into a

more extensive aristocracy consisting of rich merchant class and also men of letters (both Minhaj and Amir Khusrau were appointed in high administrative posts), and thus by virtue of their wealth and intellect they became a part of the Sultanate aristocracy.[10] The immigrant nobility in Bengal society, from the 13th century to the 16th century, was overwhelmingly urban, concentrated primarily in the three successive capital cities of the Sultanate - Lakhnauti, Pandua and Gaur, and also to a certain extent in the provincial towns and ports of Satgaon. Sonargaon and Chatgaon[11]. The members of the nobility, regardless of where their land-assignments were located, had to maintain residences in the capital city which was also necessitated by the character of their administrative duties. The nobles and merchants formed the Muslim elite/ashraf which also included urban sufis, the ulama and foreign born military captains and administrators. Foreign origin formed an important element of ashraf identity. Nobility was determined by immigration from the west in direct proportion to the nearness in point of time and distance in point of land of origin from Bengal to Arabia. The mullas, the qazis and the arbab <landholders> all were considered ashraf.[12]

The nobility under the independent Sultanate of Bengal may be divided into three social categories : (i) immigrant nobles/Muslim groups of foreign origin; (ii) Hindu groups integrated by gradual political and economic process; (iii) converted local Muslim groups later inducted :

(i) In the epigraphic and other sources there are evidences that elaborate titles were used, in imitation of imperial titles, by the first category of nobles.[13] Titles indicate either designations held by individual nobles or awarded in recognition of their eminence and loyalty to the Sultan, or both; thus often than not these were hierarchical and honorific in nature. This was one of the important symptoms of gradual transformation of individual military captains representing their particular clan affiliation to an organized class responsible to the immediate political authority. In the initial period of Turkish occupation there was no clearly defined political authority of sovereign independent status to assume the title of 'Sultan' in Bengal. In the Delhi Sultanate, the innovation of the title Khan, never

used before, awarded to Shamsi Maliks, came from the Mongols who called their sovereigns 'Khan' or 'Qa'an'/Extraordinarily Exalted One. Its award in large number was an innovation of Iltutmish's last years.[14] In Minhaj's list of Shamsi Maliks, who held iqta on the death of Iltumish, included the name of Awar Khan Aibak, said to be a Turk, who held the important iqta of Lakhnauti, but most possibly he was freeborn and not a slave of the Sultan.[15] Malik Alauddin Jani a Prince of Turkestan, was assigned the iqtas in Bihar and Bengal. Minhaj's list of nobles <upto 1260> was corroborated by Barani in detail after almost hundred years.[16] In Bengal, at first the title Khan was generally used to denote high ranking military officials who combined administrative duties as well. Later, with the growth of Indo-Turkish groups, Khan became a honorific title used by both Hindu and Muslim landed and military class. 'Malik' <Turkish> was the prefix of high ranking foreign Muslim officers and military captains. But later both Hindu and converted Muslim officers and landlords used it as a suffix,by slightly changing they generally used it as family name indicating their high social status.

From the early stage of Turkish rule walis and muqtis used high-sounding titles like Khan-i-azam, Khaqan-i-muazzam, Majlis ul majalis, Malik ul umara, Pahlavi-i-aor-wazzaman, frequently used by distinguished Muslim nobles of foreign origin.[17] The right of awarding these titles on the nobles, exclusively reserved by the Sultans, also emphasized their supreme political authority which was asserted as a binding force on the loyalty of the awardees. The claim of the nobility to importance as the most powerful section of the ruling class was manifested through the titles.

The military and economic roles of the nobles were not clearly defined in the early stage of Turkish rule. Immigrant nobles had the responsibility to furnish military assistance at the summons of the superior political authority, whether local or central. It is not certain from the sources that the muqtis required to supply a fixed number of soldiers to the higher authority. In Muhammmad bin Tughloq's iqta system all army officers from Khan to Sipahsalar, were assigned iqta by the state in lieu of their pay.[18] A hierarchical order in the nobility, based on the number of officers and soldiers, is defined to a

certain extent by Barani when he says that the Turki cavalry was based on decimal.[19] Barani has been contradicted by a 14th century Arabic source.[20] Thus it is difficult to determine whether the divisions were made on the basis of minimum or maximum number of soldiers in the control of the concerned nobles.But it is indicated that a hierarchical order in the nobility was existent; although in the epigraphic and other sources in Bengal there is no data available to determine the exact number of soldiers controlled by the officers. The economic role of the nobility has been discussed later in the iqta system as land organization.

The nobility assumed different socio-political roles in independent Sultanate period. As there was no hard and fast rule of succession in the Islamic political system, nor was the convention of primogeniture strictly and uniformly enforced, death or deposition of a Sultan was often followed by chaos and confusion leading to partisan group struggle aggravating the situation. The nobility played very crucial role in case of disputed accession to the throne or in war of succession. In this kind of critical situation the usual procedure was to seek formal sanction from the nobility. More often than not the nobles used to take sides and participate in succession wars. Every reigning Sultan needed to have his own group of loyal nobles in the court. Generally the Sultans used to distribute and redistribute iqtas among their loyal followers, to most favourites and powerful ones, at the time of accession. In case of Bengal it has been confirmed by Babur <1526-1530> when he comments 'if the royal heart demands that a person should be dismissed and another be appointed in his place, the whole body of subordinates attached to that office became new office holders'.[21] By transfer and redistribution of iqtas the nobles were kept totally dependent on the will and discretionary power of the sovereign. This was an important tactics followed by the rulers to keep control on the nobles.

The nobility had an important role to play in the administration, the bureaucratic character was the most marked feature of the institution. The presence of several departments of the government, like those of finance, correspondence, police, judiciary and military affairs, are indicated in the sources, but their functions and jurisdictions

are not very clearly defined. Designations, such as wali, muqti, wazir, sipah salar, sar-i-khail, sar-i-lashkar, mir-i-bahr, dabir-i-khas, darogah-i-taksal, kar-i-farman, mustaufi-i-mamalik, kotwal-bakali, qazi, etc. etc. are available in epigraphic and other sources.[22] Most important position after Sultan was that of wazir. Azam Khan and Raja Ganesh under Ghyasuddin Azam Shah (1390-1410), Khan Jahan in the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah (1481-1486), Habsh Khan under Qutbuddin Mahmud Shah (1489-1490), Syyed Hussain Makki under Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah (1490-1493), are the examples of powerful wazirs in the Bengal Sultanate.[23] Both Raja Ganesh and Syyed Hussain Makki captured power taking advantage of political crisis and weakness of the reigning sultans. The wazir was closely related to finance and military affairs. General characteristics of the function of wazir has been stated by Firishta as *Sahib ikhtiyar ul mulk wa mal garded'/ in* charge of general administration and the revenue affairs.[24] It seems that subordinate wazirs acted as local officers in iqlim, arsah or shahr. More often than not a noble was given several responsibilities at a time. In a Fatah Shahi inscription (1486) one Malik Muqarrab Abdullah was said to be the Royal Keeper of Wadrobe (outside the palace), the Commander and Wazir of Muazzamabad/Mahmudabad.[25] In the fragmentary Ghazipur inscription of Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474), a noble, Iqtar Khan, is mentioned as wali over several places including Ghazipur (in present U.P.). Iqtar Khan is also mentioned as wazir, sar-i-khail and sar-i-lashkar.[26] It is possible that these posts were given to colonized foreign Muslim nobles who were not available in large numbers; due to restricted number of nobles of foreign origin, several duties were performed by one person. In the Triveni inscription of the reign of Ruknuddin Barbak Shah sar-i-khail Ulugh Ajmal Khan has been mentioned as a subordinate of sar-i-lashkar Iqram Khan.[27] Kotwal bakali's post has been mentioned in the Devikot inscription (1512) of the reign of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah;[28] a number of subordinate kotwals in charge of local law and order maintenance is available in epigraphic, and literary sources as well. Provincial governor, wali combined the roles of 'sar-i-lashkar wa wazir'/ commander-cum revenue minister.[29] Wazir in reality meant the post

which bore the major administrative burden of the Sultani administration. In Bengal Sultanate the term 'wazir' was applied to provincial governors probably in the sense of Assistant to the Sultan. In the Sylhet inscription of Alauddin Hussain Shah wazir and sar-i-lashkar Ruknuddin Khan has been mentioned as *'hasht kamhariyan'*/ 'eight time victorious', in clear reference to the major military role played by him.[30] Epigraphic source indicate another designation, that of *'sharabdar-i-ghair mahalli'*/Bearer of the Cup (outside the palace). There are references to the existence of this post in the time of the Ilyas Shahi's and the Abyssinian rulers. M. R. Tarafdar is of opinion that this office was conferred on a local governor who accompanied the Sultan in his expeditions and was given the responsibility to supervise the drinks supplied to the ruler in order to eliminate any chance of poisoning him.

Their lavish and urbanized life-style, in imitation of the royalty, has been depicted in different sources form court chronicles to accounts of foreign travellers. A graphic description of the Sultani court, the protocols and etiquettes, courtiers and officers, is available in the 15th century Chinease sources.[31] Barbosa's description of higher class Muslims prove the affluence, luxury, the 'extravagancy' of their life-style.[32] Their brick-built mansions, great bathing tanks attached to the houses, their expensive attires, rich jewelleries and costly turbans, the sumptuous and delicious food they consumed - all are evidences of the luxurious way of life enjoyed by this rich urban group. Both Ma Huan and Barbosa mention that drinking was a common practice in the upper class society.[33] Social gatherings, festivities on special occasions with dinning, drinking, music and dancing added to the pomp and splender of life. Both Firishta and a later source, Ghulam Hussain Salim, observe that the Bengal nobles used to take food on gold platters; it became a common custom that at big banquets, the noble, who could produce the largest number of gold plates, enjoyed highest prestige in the circle.[34] Even in the declining period of the Sultanate, Humayun is said to have been bewildered by the grandeur and splender that was Gaur, the capital of Bengal (1538).[35] But this spectacular life-style was responsible for the social decadence manifested in the prevalence of certain

institutions and practices like wide scale polygamy, domestic slavery, concubinage, harem system, etc. This tremendous affluence and consequent decadence could be attributed to the overflow of wealth accumulated through trade and agricultural surplus consumed and enjoyed by the nobility as an urban ruling class.

To rely on a particular group in the nobility for too long was fraught with danger. After safe and peaceful succession to power, the Bengal Sultans tried to maintain a balance between different groups in the court. Group conflict within the nobility was quite apparent in the reign of Ghyasuddin Azam Shah <1390-1410> who paved his way to the throne of Bengal after an armed encounter with his father Sultan Sikandar Shah <1390> in which the latter had died; also Azam Shah secured the accession by killing several of his stepbrothers.[36] In this succession dispute leading to a political crisis in the early Sultanate, the nobility was sharply divided for and against Azam Shah.[37] After Azam Shah's death in 1410 the Sultanate became considerably weakened due to internal strife. At this time a contemporary Amir, Raja Ganesh, according to Firishta <d. 1613>, 'attained to great power and predominance' during the reign of Sultan Shihabuddin Byazid Shah <1411-1414> when he became 'the Master of the Treasury and the Kingdom.' When the Sultan died, Ganesh, according to Firishta, 'raising aloft the banner of kingship seized the throne and ruled for three years and several months'.[38] But Nizamuddin Ahmad, making no mention of the usurpation of throne by the Raja, only says that after the death of Shihabuddin Byazid Shah 'a zamindar of the name of Kans acquired power and dominion over the country of Bangala' and his *'muddat-i-istila'* period of power lasted seven years.[39] There is no proof that in this power struggle Ganesh was opposed by Muslim nobles; Firishta is of opinion that he had friends among the Muslims.[40] But the sufis and the ulama reacted with shock and outrage; and their leader, and the most eminent sufi of the time Nur Qutb Alam wrote a letter to Ibrahim Sharqi, Sultan of the kingdom of neighbouring Jaunpur, imploring him to invade Bengal and rid it from Ganesh to save the 'Kingdom of Islam'.[41] There are several opinions about Ibrahim Sharqi's invasion of Bengal which are not relevant to the point of discussion here. There is no

evidence of active participation of Muslim nobles, favouring invasion from outside or attempt to depose the Raja, found in the available sources. Firishta explicitly mentions conciliatory policy of Raja Ganesh toward Indo-Turkish groups in the capital city of Pandua, although Raja Ganesh was not a Muslim, he mixed freely with them and had so much love for them that some Muslims, witnessing to his faith in Islam, wanted to bury him in Islamic manner.[42] The grave political crisis was diffused politically by conversion of Jadu, the son of Raja Ganesh, to Islam, and his accession to the throne as Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah <1418-1431>. At this the nobles of the realm declared 'we follow the king in worldly affairs, but have nothing to do with religion'.[43]

These are clear indications of the emergence of Indo-Turkish nobility under the Sultanate, which gradually became a reality since the time of the Ilyas Shahis. Conversion of Jadu to Islam raising him to the throne of Bengal was a compromise between Raja Ganesh and the Indo-Turkish nobility in the court of Pandua, worked out as the price for accepting the candidate of their selection. But some times tension between Turkish ruling class and the Hindu elites did surface. Towards the end of the 14th century sufis of the Chishti and Firdausi order vehemently championed purification and reform of Islam and insisted that the foreign and Islamic identity of the Sultanate should not be diluted by admitting non-believers into the ruling class. In 1397, Muzaffar Shams Balkhi <d.1400> an eminent Sufi of the Firdausi order wrote, 'the vanquished unbelievers with heads hanging down, exercise their power and authority to administer the lands which belong to them. But they have also been appointed <executive> officers over the Muslims in the land of Islam, and they impose their orders on them. Such things should not happen'.[44] There are two factors apparent from this protest letter : The Bengali nobles already constituted an experienced class of administrators who knew the land, the people local custom and traditional ways of administration. Bengal's physical isolation, along with political isolation after the severance of ties with Delhi, made it difficult for Indo-Turkish ruling class to recruit foreign nobles from upper India or Middle east; this dictated the situation where powerful Bengali nobles be maintained

in positions of local authority. Secondly, though, the Sultanate aligned itself ideologically with the Middle East, it was already deeply rooted politically and socially into the soil of Bengal. Muzaffar Shams Balkhi's protest is itself an evidence that induction and integration of non-Muslim local nobles had already been the policy adopted by the Bengal Sultans. But the fundamental contradiction shaped the most acute domestic crisis the Sultanate faced by the upheaval created with the rise of Raja Ganesh. It is also to be noted here that in both the cases the protest came from the ulama and not from the nobility, which retained its political character. Political role of the nobility was a continuation to the later periods. Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah <1431-1442>, son of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah <1418-1431>, was assassinated by his slaves, Nasir Khan and Sadi Khan.[45] When the killer Nasir Khan attempted to usurp political power, the nobles of the realm united to depose and eliminate him. They nominated Nasiruddin Mahmud <1442-1449>, a deserving descendant of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah to the throne of Bengal.[46]

In the Mahmud Shahi rule <1442-1486>, after the death of Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah <1474-1481>, the nobles of the court raised his son Sikandar to the throne. But when they realized that Sikandar was mentally deranged and as such, was unfit to remain a Sultan, he was immediately deposed by them and Jalaluddin Fatah Shah was made the next ruler.[47] But the delicate balance between groups within the nobility was upset at the end of the Mahmud Shahi rule, specially in the reign of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah <1459-1474> the Abyssinian faction in the nobility captured power for seven years<1486-1493>. The Mahmud Shahis<1442-1486>, despite their effective rule, were responsible to a certain extent for the appearance of the institution of military slavery. In the sixth and seventh decades of the 15th century black slaves from Abyssinia were recruited in large numbers for military and civil service. Firishta says that Ruknuddin Barbak Shah imported 8000 Abyssinians into Bengal and appointed many of them in important posts. According to a modern scholar, Rakhaldas Banerjee, the Sultan wanted to curb the influence of some groups in the nobility by appointing Abyssinians to guard his person and the royal palace; this bore evil results in the future. Within

a short time they subverted the very purpose for which they were initially employed. The Abyssinians conspired against Barbak Shah's younger brother Fatah Shah and assassinated him. This coup d'etat ended the Mahmud Shahi rule in Bengal, plunging the Sultanate into seven stormy years of misrule and bloodshed. But by another triumphant coup an influential circle of nobles raised Alauddin Hussain <1493-1519>, a Meccan Arab, to the throne <1493>. He launched the last important ruling house of independent Bengal, the Hussain Shahi dynasty. His son, Nusrat Shah <1519-1532> wanted one of his sons, Mahmud, as his immediate successor, but the latter's young son <1532> ascended the throne 'by the counsel of the Grandees of the Court'.[48]

Since the arrival of the Turkish groups in the early 13th century foreign influence on the ruling class was gradually yielding place to local culture and indegenisation of the upper stratum of the society. It has been already discussed how in the early period of Turkish occupation in Bengal the Hindu tributaries in the vassalage system were gradually being absorbed in the newly emerging polity.[49] The number of tributary nobles who attended the royal court of Delhi, was numerous but their political leverage was negligible. The example of Rai Danuj who helped Balban to capture the rebel muqti of Lakhnauti, Tughral Khan, is a clear indication that the former left the tributaries in due place. But with the advent of the Khaljis in Delhi, far-reaching changes took place in the state polity with regard to the recruitment dependent on pretention to noble lineage or past glory. Doors of official opportunities were thrown open to all, and race, birth, and even creed, ceased to be important criteria. Hindu pawaries of Gujrat became influential during Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah Khaljis rule <1317-1320>. Their downfall came through the assassination of the Sultan by them. Ghyasuddin Tughloq punished the Pawaris, but allowed the Hindu Khokkars as officers and sawars in his service who, on the other hand, supported him in the power struggle for the throne.[50] This policy was further extended in the reign of Muhammad bin Tughloq <1325-1351>. Both Ibn Batuta and Barani mention that the reign of Muhammad bin Tughloq was marked with the elevation of 'low-born persons' whom the Sultan raised to

important positions in the Empire. But the nature of posts assigned to them indicates that most of them were educated people; for instance, Ratan the Barber, actually a mathematician, was appointed wali of Sind. Isami would have us believe that Muhammad bin Tughloq favoured Hindus, because he was the enemy of Islam and therefore, subjected Muslims everywhere to tyranny. Least reactions seem to have occurred against the appointment of Hindus, high castes as well as low-castes, to government posts.[51]

Appointment of Hindus in the Sultanate administration in the Ilyas Shahi period was a major shift in the power balance from the foreign Muslim groups only to the native groups. Continuous rivalry and jealousy resulting from personal ambition and clan struggle among different groups in the nobility could be explained by the fact that tough resistance was put up against new admission to the class as a whole. Despite all these problems Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah successfully integrated Hindus in the royal army in his fight against Delhi. Barani mentions that the payaks claimed themselves as abu Bangalah and staked their life for the Bengal Sultan in his fight against the Tughloqs.[52] Ilyas Shah effectively inducted payaks and dhanuks in his army which has been described by Afif as lashkar-i-Bangalah. Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi mentions the name Sahadeo as captain of the payaks who died in the battle-field fighting for the Bengal Sultan. Ilyas Shah was the first Muslim ruler who has been referred by Afif as Sultan-i-Bangalah, Shah-i-Bangalah and still more interestingly Shah-i-Bangaliyan, which indicate that not only was he the territorial ruler of Bengal, but also he was considered the king of the Bengalis, irrespective of the difference in religion of the ruler and the ruled.[53]

The policy of induction and integration was consciously continued by the later Ilyas Shahi rulers. It has already been noted that in the reign of Ghyasuddin Azam Shah Hindus were being appointed in high executive posts of the state and an influential religious personality of the time Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi gave warning to the Sultan pointing to the danger of the policy of appointing non-believers in such high positions. Raja Ganesh held the post of wazir in the reigns of Saifuddin Humza Shah and Shihabuddin Byazid Shah, two relatively weak Sultans of the Mahmud Shahi dynasty <1442-1486>.[54]

From Firishta and other sources it seems that Raja Ganesh, who has been referred to as *'chahar sad sala zamindar'*/a land holder of four hundred years <standing>by his contemporary Nur Qutb Alam, belonged very much to the Azam Shahi nobility. [55] Internal contradiction and political turmoil resulting from tension and rivalry between the ulama and the nobility led to his capture of power. An united nobility accepted Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah, a lone exception in the Sultani period of the converted son of a Hindu noble declared usurper by the ulama, as the ruler of Bengal. This was decided also to escape from the imminent threat of Sharqi domination of Bengal.[56]

The Mahmud Shahis <1442-1486> desired to adorn their court with educated and cultured individuals irrespective of their creed. During their time Bengal became a great centre of culture reflecting syncretic elements drawn out of the process of acculturation between Hindu and Muslim traditions. It has already been stated that in the court of Ruknuddin Barbak Shah and Jalaluddin Fatah Shah Hindus formed the most important section of the nobility and the bureaucracy. From Bengali literary sources it is known that Ananta Sen, Kedar Roy, Bhandasi Roy, Biswas Roy, Narayan Das and others, were appointed in high posts; it is to be specially noted here that some of them held most confidential and responsible posts in the government. It is a dichotomy that at the same time the Abyssinians became a powerful factor in the polity, which was responsible for the final overthrow of the enlightened Mahmud Shahi rule in Bengal <1486>.

The Hussain Shahi's <1493-1538> were the last important ruling house in independent Bengal. The reigns of Alauddin Hussain Shah <1493-1519> and his son Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah <1519-1532> are generally regarded as the golden age of Bengal Sultanate, primarily because of their enlightened policy. In terms, of physical extent and territorial power, too, this was the Sultanate's high tide. In Hussain Shah's reign very large number of his civil servants were Bengali. As has already been stated that Sanatan himself and quite a few of the members of his family were employed in high positions in the government; incidentally their's was in origin an influential landed brahman family. Kesava Basu, Subuddhi Roy, Mukunda, Ananta, and many others belonging to kayastha and vaidya families, held

important posts in the state service. All along the process of indegenisation of the ruling class went on where the Bengalis accommodated themselves to the Turkish rule.

From the time of Alauddin Khalji Hindu converts to Islam rose high in the services under the Delhi Sultanate and turned out to be a powerful wing in the nobility. By the time of the Tughloqs, racial and clan principles were discarded, as many other forces were at work which discouraged the possibilities of the rise of any particular group in the ruling class. From this time onward the neo-Muslim families were able to raise themselves socially. Condemnation by Minhaj and Barani of Indian converts to Islam or of descendants of early converts, suggest that they had already started competing with early immigrants from Central Asia and other Islamic countries for posts in state services.[57] Barani advises that the children of low-born converts to Islam should never be admitted to madrasahs, because, education would inevitably qualify them for government jobs. He praises Balban for making only noble birth a prerequisite for admission in state services; the example cited here is a case when the Sultan rejected a low caste convert for the post of a district accountant. According to Barani, the last phase of Alauddin Khalji's reign was dominated by low-born bureaucrats, and with their ascendancy as shiqdars and officers, the whole administration was disturbed and due to this people suffered.[58] Even religious and quasi religious posts, originally exclusive privilege of members of certain old and respectable families <Shaykhs and Sayyads>, were entrusted to just educated people, but with noble birth[59]. In this way, from the 14th century onwards the spread of education and also other factors, helped to undermine the social barriers created by Muslim immigrant families for converted Muslims in the early days of the Delhi Sultanate.

In Bengal converted Muslims in the nobility must have been a late development, not before the 15th century, when first evolution of Bengali speaking Muslim upper class emerged out of the large scale conversion of the lower grades of the local Hindu society. It is difficult to make out from the names who could be a converted Muslim and who belonged to immigrant family, because both used Islamic names; although at some points typical names used by ajlafs and

others by ashrafs could be a determinant of the difference between converted Muslims and foreign colonized Muslims. Immigrant Muslims formed the military aristocracy as generals/ governors/walis, muqtis, etc., whose participation in the administration and warfare made them a special and separate social category; they have been widely reflected in the epigraphic records and court chronicles. But this is not always true in case of converted Muslims in the nobility. For example, the family of Rasti Khan who was the administrator of the important port of Chatgaon in the time of Ruknuddin Barbak Shah,and his descendants Paragal Khan and Chhuti Khan, under Alauddin Hussain Shah were sar-i-lashkar /military governors in the same area.[60] Under their patronage and order, two Bengali poets, Kavindra Parameshwar and Srikara Nandi translated in Bengali parts of Mahabharata from original Sanskrit. This family, quite high up in the nobility from late 15th century to the first decades of the 16th century, is claimed to have originated in one Mahisawar <rider of the fish, title used by Sufis sometimes indicating their travel by sea-route> who had come from abroad and married a brahman woman.[61] It is not sure what kind of name was Rasti, but is certain that Paragal and Chhuti are not Arabic or Persian words; also their understanding of the vernacular and patronage to Bengali literature, may lead one to believe that originating in mixed marriage it was a converted Muslim family. It is also to be noted here that this family enjoyed the right of hereditary governorship of Chatgaon area, at least for three generations.

Prof. Irfan Habib rightly observes that despite all tribulations and conflicts in the ruling class the fact that it still was able to retain some kind of unity and survived, the concept of a composite ruling class still existed and continued. He cites an example when a governor of Bengal declared himself Sultan, according to Minhaj, there was genuine indignation among all those who counted at that time, when the latter observes, 'among all the people of Hindustan scholars and commanders, Hindus and Muslims'. Prof. Habib draws our attention to this reference to Hindus <in the nobility> as suggesting that their views too commanded some attention[62]. In Bengal from the 14th century onwards the nobility was looked up as a class, divided not on

religious lines, but on hierarchical basis. In the early stage, immigrant Muslim nobility was torn between clan loyalty and the duty of submissiveness to the political authority. The success in keeping control over different groups in the nobility largely depended on political situation and maneuvering power of the rulers. At some points, it is difficult to differentiate the nobility as an organized class with typical feudal characteristics, from the institution of bureaucracy with official features; it has to be accepted as an institution of multiple characteristics. An elaborate order in the nobility is evidenced in the epigraphic records throughout the period under review. Highly heterogeneous character of the nobility, comprising of Turki, Pathan, Abyssinian, Arab, Persian, converted native Muslims and Hindus, is a strong feature of the institution in the independent Sultanate of Bengal.

# 5

# Land System And Revenue Organisation : Change And Continuity

The general economic pattern existing in the period under study was very largely a continuation, with modifications and adjustments, of the system which took centuries to grow and evolve. In pre-1200 period a different attitude towards land is noticeable in use of space for administrative divisions and use of land for cultivation and other socio-economic purposes. In a predominantly agricultural economy landholding was the primary basis of social status. The significance of pre-13th century landgrant system and its economic fallout has been discussed before in detail, when and how the social hierarchy in the rural society was bound by landholdings and their use.[1]

The land system which developed in the post-Turkish conquest period was partly a continuation of the previous period. The largest division of janapadas for administrative purposes : were bhukti, mandala, chaturaka, grama, etc.[2] Grama was the base unit in the hierarchical order of space. A very valuable settlement pattern in the rural space has been given by Prof. Brajadulal Chatttopadhyay in his analysis of landgrant documents. Rural space was divided according to socio-economic need of the village people. 'Grama' in the inscriptions is used generally to denote a village. irrespective of

its size, population or revenue. Neighbouring villages were demarcated from one another by natural or artificial boundaries with inter-communication by some kind of road network. Land was clearly categorised by two major types : physical and social. Physical characteristics have been referred as 'khil'/wasteland, 'lal'/arable land, 'urvarabhumi'/fertile land, 'usharabhumi'/barrenland, etc,. These terms indicate their place in relation to cultivation of land. Its social features were divided on the basis of non-agricultural land, e.g., 'vastu'/habitat, 'gocharbhumi'/pasture, 'vikrayasthana' or 'sthala'/market place, 'smashan'/cremation ground, etc, . Space within a village was divided into 'patakas' which meant mostly the living or residential space. Apart from the three major types or divisions there are mentions of land being used for other purposes: 'patha'/paths and roads, 'gartta'/ drains, `vatika' and 'bithi'/gardens and parks, 'arnya'/'kanana'/'vana'/ kantara/forests and jungles. Space other than cultivable land was also used for various other social purposes : 'annasatra'/almshouse, 'pattasala'/establishment for learned and pious brahmans, 'koshthaka' granaries,/'khalaka'/threshing grounds, 'tailaghanakas'/oil-mills, also wells and tanks, were often mentioned in the landgrant documents.[3]

Vastu/habitat was the most important land component, but it has not been mentioned frequently in the inscriptions. Donation did not always include vastu/habitat in case where 'kshetra'/cultivable land was granted[4].The expression 'vastubhumi' occurs sometimes, included in the description of village or villages donated in the inscriptions of Sena period.Thus it might be inferred that vastubhumi was not generally donated with plots granted for cultivation.But in case of grant of village/s 'vastubhumi' sometimes have been included in the donations.

Gochara/pasture used to be generally situated at the end point of a village. Its limit was always clearly marked - the land perpetually to remain uncultivated and its access open to all villagers ('gramya pashu sangha'). Settlement of 'gopalakas' (cowherds/shepherds) were called 'goshtha'; it is not clear whether 'vraja' meant cattleranches. Designation of an official in charge of pastureland is available, 'goshthakapati'/gochakapati in one of the inscriptions of Srichandra. All these point out to the fact that sufficient importance was given to

the demarcation, use and maintenance of 'gocharas'. It also denotes that preservation of cattle resources was considered to be an important economic activity.

Forest played an important role in village life -particularly as the main source of fuel and also for building purpose. For these reasons, even after dominating rural areas, towns and markets had a subordinate relationship to villages. Spread of internal trade must have provided for a major pressure for subsequent clearance of forest land and extension of agricultural activities. Arnayka/forest has been used in certain inscriptions but not as an essential component in all landgrant documents. Sometimes forest areas outlying villages were cleared and converted to cultivable or habitable land. But generally forest land offered multiple utilities to the villagers, which necessitated their preservation for rural economy. Forest land was used as a source for woods and timber, bamboos, fruits and honey, and other articles of daily use which could be manufactured from the raw materials available from forests. But with the acceleration of the process of urbanisation and growth of internal trade, forest areas might have reduced considerably. 'Vatikas' and 'bithis' within the villages were enclosed space reserved for flower-garden and orchards, which, apart from aesthetic pleasure, had important economic utility. 'Grihasthaka vatika' was possibly the space used for kitchen-garden along with 'vastu'.[5]

'Kshetra'/cultivable land was where crops were grown - use of this word, being a part of gift, is available frequently in the 'danasasanas'. The object of grant is usually a wider area than what was denoted only by the word 'kshetra'. The term generally used to an area in a more wider sense is 'bhumi' with its boundaries specified; 'kshetra' outside ' bhumi', i.e., outside the donated area, is mentioned in the inscriptions, but 'bhumi' comprising of a number of kshetras is specially indicated in the grant documents[6]. Thus in the India Office an inscription of Lakhsmanasena(1206) mention has been made of a ' bhubhaga'/an area which consisted of 'khanda'/'kshetra', all marked out with meticulous detail[7]. Separation or division of cultivable land/ kshetra in smaller plots is very much noticeable. Two types of 'aali'/ aal/ridge separating kshetra into parts of various sizes according to

right of holding, are present in the documents. The first is termed as 'kshetra ali' dividing plots, and second is 'brishad ali' low rampart wall surrounding the whole cultivable field. Apart from demarcating the right of holding, this system also provided for retaining water within the field. Specific arability of a cultivable plot has been given a lot of importance by using terms like highland/'uddesa' or lowland/ 'tala', and so on. Measurement of space was another matter which was given some emphasis. Size of village/s have been mentioned in some of the inscriptions: area of Vallahitta was measured by 'brishavasankaranala' as 7'bhupatakas', 7'dronas', 1'adhaka', 34'unmanas' and 3'kakas' of land. This was more or less the land organization captured and inherited by the Turkish conquerors from the previous period[8]. From the next period of history land was determined primarily, not by its social and physical features, but by its revenue characteristics and potential.

From the beginning of the Turkish occupation in India, in the Delhi Sultanate, as also in the regional states which succeeded it, the appropriation of the agricultural surplus and its orderly distribution among the different sections of the ruling class was conducted mainly by an elaborate system of revenue assignment. The central characteristic of this system consisted of an arrangement whereby the management and appropriation of revenue of different territorial units rested in the members of the ruling groups under the supervision of a central authority. With the passage of time, the system tended to change in a variety of ways, often affecting or defining the degree of political centralization. The creation of a centralized polity based on military came in the wake of a long period of political fragmentation and signified some radical changes. For the transforming economy, its main consequences are linked to the level of revenue assessment and the evolution of iqta system. The term 'iqta' initially meant land received from the state. Assignments, designated 'iqta' were used in the Sultanate period, and 'jagir'/'tuyül' in the Mughal Empire. Later on the meaning of iqta changed into land revenue assigned by the government, emphasizing the fact that ownership of land belonged to the state. In the Sultanate period, theoretically land was state property, but in practice the state enjoyed the right of taxation; and it did not

have any ownership right in reality. It did not have 'any proprietary right but usufructuary right' on land enjoyed through the muqtis. But it had the right of direct supervision on 'khalisa'.

With the Ghorian conquest iqta system was introduced in the subjugated territories of northern India. The Delhi Sultanate was based on a political system which appears to have been different in many essential particulars from the feudal characteristics of the polity which it supplanted. The classic device used for centralization in Islamic polity at this time was the iqta. In the initial stage of occupation, to spread the domination fast, the Muslim conquerors permitted their military captains the right to enjoy some autonomy on the essential condition that they would pledge their loyalty to the superior political authority, collect taxes from the occupied areas and pay to the government. The assignees were also required to assist rulers militarily, by supplying soldiers, and also render services to the local authorities when required. But the system of land revenue was equally an aspect of administrative history. From the start, it was never meant, on the part of the authority, to keep it a purely revenue assignment system; it was more an administrative-cum fiscal charge.[10]

As the empire expanded and became far-flung, the central authority found it more difficult to keep control over such widely spread areas under muqtis. Whatever their designation and status meant theoretically, in reality there was every possibility of their claiming some kind of autonomy in the areas under their control. Throughout the Sultanate period there was a long undercurrent of tension between the Sultans trying to keep control over the muqtis, and they, in turn, trying to assert independence from the central authority by operating as local rulers of autonomous regions. The practice of periodic transfer of iqtas from one hand to the other was a marked feature of the early period. Transfer of muqtis were made both as an administrative arrangement and also as punitive measure. Whenever a new ruler succeeded to the throne, he made postings and transfers in order to satisfy those nobles who had rendered help to raise him at the time of accession. Political and administrative changes implied redistribution of claims on land or its produce. But

transfers on account of punishment were few and far-between-discontent of the Sultan for misconduct, defiance of royal orders, failure to deposit 'mahsul' in the Treasury in due time and conspiracy against the sovereign were some of the major factors considered in case of punishment by transfer.[11]

By the Ghorian conquest of northern India occupied areas were divided among military captains who maintained their troops essentially by plundering unpacified territories and by exacting tributes from local Hindu chiefs. But iqta system was simultaneously introduced and the military captains were designated as muqtis, occasionally also termed as 'wali'/'wilayat'. In the early phase muqtis were required to furnish military assistance at the summons of the Sultans, but they did not have to maintain or furnish a fixed number of soldiers, or, to send a fixed amount of money to the central Treasury. Gradually the tributary areas were being transformed into iqtas. The muqti had the right to sub-assign smaller size iqta to anybody of his choice taken from his own larger iqta. He maintained and paid troops from his own income. Following is a classical and partly ideal view of the system taken from an 11th century text : muqti's hold over iqta did not include his claim on the 'riaya'/peasants, other than that of collecting from them, in a proper manner, the due land-tax that had been assigned to him by central authority. The muqti did not have any claim on the persons of the peasants, their wives and children or on their wealth, land and goods, after realisation of revenue. The peasants could appeal to the court if they faced any hardship; if a muqti was proved to be an oppressor, the Sultan could punish him by taking away his assignment, so that others might be warned. Muqtis should realise that both land and the raiyat/peasantry belonged to Sultan who appointed them to their posts.[12] Following are some of the rights and duties of muqtis :

(i) Muqti was assigned the duty of collecting land revenue, but this was to be done for the Sultan and at his pleasure; (ii) Muqti had certain obligations to Sultan : (a) recruiting and maintaining troops (b) furnishing them at the call of Sultan; (iii) revenue appropriated from iqta gave the right of provision and resources to fulfill the two obligations mentioned. In short, muqti was a tax-collector, commander

and army paymaster rolled into one.

To ascertain the economic stability of the Sultanate it was imperative to devise a mechanism to collect the agricultural surplus through kharaj, from the rural areas and to get it distributed among the appropriator class. Iqta was this crucial factor in the economic structure - a territorial assignment which easily combined the two important functions of collection and distribution of the surplus. There was enough safeguard to check on the functionaries without endangering the basic unity of the political structure. From the 13th century the general pattern of the iqta system was followed everywhere in the occupied territories of northern India including Bengal. [13]

The practice of assigning iqta to muqti and wali started from the beginning and continued throughout the Sultani period. Under Balban there was an attempt to stop abuses of power of the functionaries and checking arrangement was introduced through muqti to find out actual income and expenditure of iqtas. During the rule of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316) a fresh policy of intervention of Sultani bureaucracy in the administration of iqtas had to be introduced due to the great expansion of the Empire at this time. New system of revenue assessment and collection of agrarian taxes in a vast region, the bulk of which was done by the muqtis, created a transformed position for them in relation to the Sultani government. It was a natural tendency with muqtis to collect more revenue for personal use and understate the excess payable to the central Treasury. In order to maximise collection muqtis were always anxious to prevent embezzlement of iqta officials like mutassarif and karkun. Subsequently harsh measures became a part of audit at both the levels of Sultan to muqtis and muqtis to iqta officials. During the rule of the Tughloqs there was further expansion of government control over iqtas; the power of the muqtis was undermined by separating the two functions of collecting taxes and maintaining troops- it was, in fact, a dual administration made operative. But at the end of the Tughloq period, due to grave political crisis in Firuz Shah's time, in the absence of the mechanism of separation of duty and right in the iqtas, control of the government on muqtis became nominal. This led

to hereditisation of iqta rights in the families of muqtis and other officials. Even under the successors of Firuz Shah Tughloq, iqta transfer was infrequent and central control could not be restored on hereditisation of iqta assignments. Under the Lodis (1451-1526) the system remained essentially the same, but the term iqta disappeared and was simply replaced by 'sarkar' and 'parganah' meaning territorial divisions controlled by the government. The term 'sarkar' denotes a noble's establishment, assigned a 'jama' to mete military and administrative duties of a noble. This system was a legacy to the Mughals who built upon it their elaborate 'jagirdari' system.

It is in this general background of iqta system in northern India, introduced with the Ghorian conquest, that the working of the system in Bengal should be considered. Iqtadari was introduced by Iktiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji, the first Turkish invader of Bengal; although he himself conquered parts of Bengal as an independent military captain, and he is not to be considered as a muqti sent by the Delhi government of the time. Later he paid lipservice to Muhammad bin Sam as his political superior by issuing coin in the latter's name[14]. He appointed three of his military associates as muqti - (i) Ali Mardan Khalji was given Barsaul as his iqta; (ii) Husamuddin I'waz Khalji was made muqti of Gangohi; (iii) Muhammad Shiran Khalji was also assigned an area, but the name of his iqta is not available, it is very likely that his jurisdiction covered the area on the south of Lakhnauti. After the assassination of Bakhtiyar Khalji, internecine conflict started among the Khalji maliks of Bengal, and subsequently Lakhnauti passed on to the control of the Delhi Sultanate. We come to know from the sources that at this time Husamuddin (later Ghyasuddin) I'waz Khalji was Qutbuddin Aibak's muqti in Devkote. Later Ali Mardan Khalji became the muqti of Lakhnauti, and after Qutbuddin Aibak's death, he declared independence from Delhi (1338) ; Husamuddin I'waz also declared independence by renaming himself as Sultan Ghyasuddin. In this chaotic and confusing state of affairs Minhaj describes contemporary Lakhnauti as 'mamalik', 'diar', 'wilad' and 'zamin' indicating independent region and not 'iqta' or 'vilayet' or dependent areas of the Delhi Sultanate[15]. From 1227 to 1287 Turkish occupied parts

having capital at Lakhnauti remained under the Sultans of Delhi. Despite their sporadic rebellions the muqtis and walis of this region were effectively kept under control by Iltutmish, Balban and the Khalji Sultans[16]. Upto the foundation of independent Sultanate by the Ilyas Shahis (mid 14th century), Turkish occupied Bengal was divided into three large iqtas - Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon.[17]

Timur's invasion and massacre, and the disintegration of the Tughloq empire led to the rise of independent kingdoms of Gujrat, Malwa, Jaunpur and Bengal. M.R.Tarafdar says that political separation of Bengal from the centre was but a corollary of the hierarchical scheme of Turkish feudalism in which a highly centralized government was hardly possible[18]. The Ilyas Shahis, to a certain extent, had to accept the legacy that had already evolved in the polity set up by the previous ruling class. The rule of the Balbanis under hereditary waliship served as a prelude to dynastic monarchy of the Ilyas Shahis. Balban appointed Nasiruddin Bughra Khan (1283-1291) the wali at Lakhnauti ; but at the same time he appointed muqtis in different iqtas in Bengal under his control. This was the first time when Balban ordered his son to conquer 'iqlim Bangalah' the area which Minhaj always referred simply as 'Bang', and Barani used both the terms 'iqlim' and 'arsah' regarding it[19]. Bughra Khan was imparted by his father a sort of semi-independent status with some autonomy to rule over several muqtis of the region. When Ghyasuddin Tughloq conquered Lakhnauti, he divided the whole region into three major iqtas - Sonargaon, Satgaon and Lakhnauti[20]. This system was inherited by the Ilyas Shahis when they declared independence from Delhi in the time of Firuz Shah Tughloq. Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-1358) appointed one of his sons as the muqti of Bihar ; it is a possibility that the growth of the system of hereditisation of iqtadari under Firuz Shah Tuqhloq influenced the first independent Sultan of Bengal.

There is hardly any uniformity in the administrative terms like 'iqlim', 'mulk', 'arsah', 'diyar', etc., applied to different units, and it is difficult to relate these terms to iqta areas. It is also barely possible to determine the character of the units, whether military or revenue or both from these terms. These terms have been frequently found

on a number of coins issued in the Ilyas Shahi period, neither did the Mahmud Shahis nor the Hussain Shahis aimed at the uniformity of administrative terms related to division of units. Often a whole province was termed as arsah, iqlim or mulk[21]. With the consolidation of the independent Sultanate, the jurisdiction over large autonomous principalities changed into more fragmented 'jagir' areas. This change was a fall out of the expansion of the nobility as a feudal class, when large iqta areas were fragmented and distributed as jagirs amongst the ever-increasing number of assignees[22]. From this time onward emerged a hierarchical pattern in landed class generically divided into groups such as jagirdars, zamindars, etc,.[23]

The term 'jagir' which, by the end of the 16th century, came to be accepted as a standard term for a revenue assignment, is actually 'a shortened form of the Persian word 'jaygir' meaning possessing, occupying a place, fixing a habitation, making a settlement'. It possibly originated in the popular administrative jargon used by the petty officials in the early years of Akbar's reign. In the works written or compiled before Akbar's time the nomenclature of jagir does not occur; but in the official papers of the 17th century the term was frequently used to describe revenue assignment. 'Its occurrence seems to have synchronised with the transition from the semi-permanent territorial arrangements of the Lodi period to the revenue assignment of the Mughal period' . The term jagir was gradually substituted as official term for the archaic expression of the Sultanate period 'iqta'. It denotes a particular type of landholding where the revenue of an area was assigned by the government to a noble who became jagirdar by agreeing to use the collected revenue to raise and maintain troops which he was to lead in service of the Sultan whenever summoned.[24]

In reference to Bengal in the 15th century, the term 'jagirdar' has been used in epigraphic and other type of sources, but without much clarification. In a Mahmud Shahi inscription (1448) one Ibn Baha has been mentioned as jagirdar, and Malik Azuddin Yahya has been referred to as 'jagirdar of Satgaon' by Sirhindi.[25] In the early part of the 15th century, Ma Huan noticed that the soldiers were being 'paid in kind'; he also noted wide circulation of tankas and cowries in the market[26]. To be paid in cash or in kind does not preclude

the possibility of, at least, an elementary type of jagir system ; it is also a probability that Ma Huan here meant 'land' equal to 'kind'. In Ying Yai Sheng lan and Si Yang Ch'ao Kang tien lu one gets the same impression[27]. It is known that metallic currency was present, but was in restricted circulation in the Sultanate period; so it was a possibility that payment could be conveniently made through jagir system. At the end of the period of our study Nizamuddin comments, 'Nasib Shah bestowed on all of them (Afghan nobles) jagirs as far as possible depending on exigencies of the time'[28]. Similarly, Firishta, and later on Salim, convey the same idea without using the exact term 'jagir'[29]. All the three historians refer to the Afghan nobles who had escaped Babur's attack and took shelter in Bengal, then being ruled by Nusrat Shah (1519-1532). But Dr. M.R. Tarafdar is of opinion that since the Afghan nobles are not mentioned by the historians as having accepted service under the Bengal Sultan (Nusrat Shah), there is no reason to believe that they enjoyed jagirs. He opines that the refugee Afghan nobles were, at the most, given the right of 'ijaradari', which later Nizamuddin confused with 'jagirdari'[30]. But it should be taken into consideration that Nizamuddin was thoroughly acquainted with jagir system, then widely prevalent in north India; he actually makes clear difference between 'jagirdari' and 'zamindari' when he observes that Sikandar Lodi granted some parganahs in jagir to his own followers taking them away from the zamindars of Bihar[31]. Thus the possibility of Nusrat Shah's granting jagirs to the Afghan nobles, in the imminent threat of Mughal attack on Bengal, cannot be ruled out. But it is a fact that we do not have either extensive reference or detailed information about jagir system in the independent Sultanate period; scanty references in the 15th century sources do not lead us to any clear view of the working of the system in pre-Mughal Bengal.

Origin of the institution of zamindari went back to the early period of Turkish rule in India, but no definition of the word 'zamindar' is available in the early Persian sources. Probably this term was used by Barani and Afif for the first time in the 14th century[32]. In Mahru's Insha both the terms 'zamindar' and 'muqaddam' are available. Firuz Shah Tughloq in his proclamation issued on the eve of his expedition

to Bengal in 1353, implied that Zamindars comprised people like muqaddams, mafrozis, maliks, etc,. Muqaddams seemed to be identical with 'khots'. According to Barani, those, who were granted control over land inplace of earlier dominant elements, were termed as 'mafrozis' ; they were, thus, a new group of people set up to perform functions of the old aristocracy[33]. The term 'zamindar' was initially applied to Hindu chiefs ouside the Sultanate; later on mafrozis substituted them. The term 'malik' was used, rather freely, for any person with superior right over land. But Moreland believes that 'malik' was identical with 'zamindar'.[34]

Mid-14th century alterations in the land-system led to the division of entire rural population into just two groups from the perspective of the revenue receiving ruling class: (i) the peasants and (ii) the zamindars. Both the groups have been described as ri'aya/subjects, who had to give revenue only when terrorised and forced by the army. The word 'zamindar' was now pressed into a new use 'as a blanket term for the entire superior rural class'[35]. Zamindari did not mean ownership of land, it actually meant certain rights over agricultural produces. The peasantry had to yield land tax/kharaj to the government as revenue/mahsul that reached the administration through different agencies which created a class of intermediaries between the State and the primary producers, and zamindar was one such. Zamindars were not a homogeneous group in the beginning, but zamindari was indicative of certain rights over crops produced by cultivators. Later on zamindars tended to form a comprehensive social category embracing all kinds of superior landholders. It, at the same time, tended to imply a process by which variety of complex rights were shaped into a more uniform and simple pattern.[36]

In the economic process this general pattern of control and right over land was interrupted in the 15th century owing to political circumstances leading to the decline of the Delhi Sultanate and the emergence of the independent kingdoms which came out of it. Local hereditary chiefs were again becoming powerful and exercised authority over large tracts of land ; possibly there was partial revival of the old rural aristocracy in transformed variety. At the end of the Lodi period villages were divided into two categories: one set

comprised of muqaddams/headmen and cultivators, and the other by zamindars who were also called muqaddams. This tradition was followed by Farid Khan (later Sher Shah) in Bihar and U.P. A very important document ( 1530) has been discussed by Prof. Irfan Habib, which shows two kinds of claim to the surplus in the same hand. This might have been the measure of relative wealth and power of the Sultanate ruling class, deriving its income from land revenue as superior rural groups.[37]

Zamindars were representative of local administrators in the villages. In the 16th century chaudhuri was the hereditary zamindar held answerable for the collection of revenue in the parganah. The descendants of the chieftain families who held control over village units, like the rais/ranakas/rauts, reappeared now as chaudhuris ; but they did not possess much of their previous power and authority. Still they formed a part of the rural aristocracy by having a share of the land revenue. This is the major reason why the word chaudhuri in this period has been used as almost identical to the term 'zamindar'. It was also used as a designation of revenue officer who was a collector of land revenue on behalf of the government. Later on, in Bengal 'chaudhuri' has been widely used, both by the Hindus and by the Muslims, as family name/surname indicative of their hereditary designation originally as revenue collectors. Police administration and revenue collection were the two rights inherent in the institution of zamindari contingent forces/armed retinues, who were generally called paiks (originally payaks/footsoldiers) in Bengal, were maintained by all zamindars.[38]

Dr. M.R. Tarafdar is of opinion that there was no zamindari system evident in Hussain Shahi Bengal ( 1493-1538), in the later sense of the term. He says that there was a type of revenue farming, 'majmu'adari' which was equivalent to 'ijaradari', i.e., revenue contract or muqata'a made with the government for lease or 'ijara' of a particular area to collect land tax payable to the authority[39]. But we know from the sources that long before the Hussain Shahi period, Raja Ganesh of Bhaturia (north-Bengal, called as 'Hakim of Dwynaj') was mentioned as 'an infidel zamindar of four hundred years(standing)' by the renowned Shaykh Nur Qub Alam in one of his letters written

during a grave political crisis[40]. Also, in the Bayaz of Mulla Taqiya Bhairav Singh has been mentioned as 'zamindar of Tirhut', who failed to pay taxes to Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah, for which he was punished by the ruler himself[41]. In Tripura Rajmala it has been mentioned that Pratap Roy, zamindar of Bardakhat, left the side of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah and joined with Raja Dhanyamanikya of Tripura[42]. In vernacular source choudhuri, mandal, pradhan, etc., are almost equivalent terms. It is not clear in the vernacular source whether choudhuri, mandal, etc., were directly under zamindars or they operated under local administrative officers like 'mulukpati', 'adhikari', 'deshpati' and others. The term 'talluqdar' is not avaliable in the indegeneous sources of pre-Mughal Bengal. Abul Fazl (1582) noticed that in the sarkar Fatahbad alone there were three classes of zamindars, and tallukdars of Suleimanabad paid a certain amount of rent to the authorities[43]. Also, terms like 'dihidar', 'shiqdar', etc., belonged to the Mughal period.

Dr. M.R. Tarafdar opines that majmu'adars and ijardars of Hussain Shahi period had gradually grown into hereditary landlords during the period of political chaos and social crisis emerging out of Mughal-Afghan fight (1538-1576)[44]. In the early 16th century a system of revenue collection, termed as majmū`adari/ijaradari, is evident in the vernacular source[45]. It was a contract/ `muqata`a'(Arabic-broken form `mokta' in Bengali) for lease/`ijara' between the government and the collector for collection of revenue of a particular area on a fixed amount payable annually. The example cited from Bengali literature is of Gobordhon and Hiranya Majumdar of Satgaon. At the end of the period under study the Portuguese received some kind of revenue rights from Mahmud Shah III ( 1532-1537) with control on customs of Satgaon and Chatgaon - they acquired the right to build customs-houses, and also the right to collect revenue in the port areas[46]. The Bengal Sultan provided the Portuguese with this right possibly to get their support to encounter the attack of Sher Khan. Nothing is known about the nature of landholding followed by the Portuguese. The conjecture made by Moreland in this connection is as follows :

In view of the conditions which prevailed, it is reasonable to

infer that these farms were in the nature of clearing leases, that is to say, a fixed annual payment was accepted for vacant land, which the farmer had to bring under cultivation in order to obtain a profit'.[47]

There is no source available yet to substantiate this statement. In both the cases cited above muqata'a was done for ijara in port areas. Now, it is difficult to make out from the sources whether revenue in these cases meant customs duties and other taxes related to trade only ; the amount collected by Majumdar brothers was enormous - twenty lakhs of rupees in those days. It is not clear if the revenue collected included land-tax also, inclusive of surrounded and dependent land of the areas concerned. There is a possibility that with the growth of port-towns as centres of international and internal trading, like Chatgaon and Satgaon, majmu'adari/ijaradari system developed in these areas only. It is to be specially noted that both the examples are available in the early and late Hussain Shahi period.

`Khalisa' was the land kept as private and not sub- assigned for tax collection. Usually the crop pattern and revenue rates, fixed for khalisa areas, were different from iqta or jagir land. Expenditure of the royalty was carried out from the khalisa, fixed for special purpose, and rest of the land was distributed as jagir for general purpose. Barani suggests that peasants were required to pay tax in kind and not in cash, but only in khalisa area (reserved for the Sultan's Treasury). In the reign of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316), the entire Doab area was brought under khalisa and from the income of its mahsul the soldiers were paid in cash. The two contradictory statements of Barani can be reconciled only in this way : (i) normally tax was collected in cash ; (ii) only on special occasions collection in kind was encouraged in khalisa area; (iii) by collection in kind the Sultan availed the opportunity of obtaining food-stuff for granaries to reserve stock against scarcities in supply. Mahsul from khalisa was collected directly by government officers on behalf of the Sultans and not by intermediaries.[48]

The process by which an area was brought under khalisa was termed as `khas'. In Bengal the difference between jagir and khalisa can be made out from scanty references in vernacular literature. There is an interesting illustration of how land could be turned into

'khalisa' in the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah :

The Sultan was going to invade Orissa and wanted his chief minister Sanatan to accompany him in the expedition, but the latter avoided the Sultan and remained at home posing sickness. The Sultan paid a surprise visit and rebuked him for his negligence of duty by citing the example of same lapse of Sanatan's elder brother Raghunandan, who happened to be a high official in the government: Raghunandan was sent to `khas' the area called Bakla, but he behaved like a 'dasyu' killing many living beings there[49]. It is possible that on the way to `khas' Bakla on behalf of the Sultan, Raghunandan evicted those inhabitants who refused to accept the proposal of bringing the area under khalisa. But it is more likely that Raghunandan himself did not want to `khas' the area despite the Sultan's order and kept it under his control. Their family, from the time of his father, Kumardeva, had been an old landlord house of Bakla-Chandradwip near the sea, which included an extensive area covering Faridpur, Bakhargaunj and Noakhali. The question remains whether Hussain Shah ordered Raghunandan to give up a part of his hereditary zamindari area to convert it to khalisa which he refused to do. It is a possibility that due to irregularity in collection of revenue more land was being brought under khalisa in the time of Alauddin Hussain Shah and this step was being resisted by the zamindars.

A very vital way of transferring agrarian surplus to the ruling class was in the form of revenue claims spent mainly to maintain religious intellectuals and other dependents on it[50]. Granting land subsidy to religious personages and institutions was a very old tradition in India; pre-1200 period system of land-grants (danasasanas) to brahamans, and temples and viharas has already been discussed in detail. In the Islamic socio-economic organisation this type of land was called 'amlak' (singular)/'milk' (plural), 'idrar' and `inam', all these terms were interchangeable. These terms were generally used in the time of the Delhi Sultanate and 'sayyur'gul' or 'madad-i-ma`ash in the Mughal period, it was also called `aymma' (plural of imam/ religious leader). Sultans used to issue farman to confer grants - land used to be made over to grantees both within khalisa and iqta. In the Sultanate period inamland granted as subsidy to religious people

and institutions, has been mentioned by Zia Barani. In this system grant of revenue of a village/s taxfree/lakharaj land was given to the recipient in perpetuity or for life. Grant was also assigned through caretaker/khadim families for the maintenance of religious institutions like mosques, dargahs, taqiyas, khanqas, etc,. Cash grants/ajifah was awarded as continuation of inam/pension, formerly made to dargahs of eminent Sufis, and also to finance annual `urs'/marriage with God/ death anniversary of Sufis, ceremony at famous dargahs.[51]

Inam area was permanently alienated from the government; generally religious grant of land was not transferable or resumable. In contrast to iqta/jagir assignments, dependent on the will of the rulers, inam grant was permanent and perpetual; but in very special cases Sultans used their right to cancel it. Alauddin Khalji and Ghyasuddin Tughloq resumed large parts of granted land previously awarded. On the other hand, Firuz Shah Tughloq returned all amlak villages and lands, resumed previously, to claimants who could prove formerly granted lawful holdings. Land from iqta, and also from khalisa, could be transferred as waqf/granted property. Transfer of cultivable land from iqta/jagir to aymma led to the reduction of revenue of muqtis and jagirdars, particularly, award of cultivable land would have reduced the revenue income of muqtis. It is not very clear from the sources what became the position of grants in case of iqta transfer from the hands of grantors.[52]

Land given in inam or amlak gave to its holders only right to enjoy the revenue, land remained with the owner of the soil. Ideological significance of this system was much greater than economic. Through this type of grant entire Muslim theological class was kept dependent on and subservient to the state. It has already been stated that aymma was another form of transferring agrarian surplus to the groups dependent on the ruling class. Immense political significance was attached by the Muslim rulers to the religious institutions, particularly to dargahs as centres of popular devotional congregations of all subjects, irrespective of faith and social status, and of people who were associated to pir-families. Also pilgrims from different parts of the empire visited famous dargahs; hence the government wanted to secure allegiance of religious groups which

wielded such hold on common people. Lone Sufis in isolated khanqas rarely received grants for their personal piety and devotion; subsidies were generally granted to those associated with religious institutions for their support to the political authority. Thus the government adopted a policy by which some Sufis were reduced to appendage of the state. Individual Sufis, who might be potentially dangerous from doctrinal standpoint, were made dependent on the state by receiving grant and other subsidies.[53] Prof. R.M. Eaton rightly points out that inam grants tended to be given either to people whose religious conservatism was already beyond doubt, or to people whose conservatism the court wished to secure. Donee Sufi families gradually emerged as an important power group - the madad-i-ma'ash landholder class.[54]

This socio-economic factor was also reflected in the internal structure of Sufism. It will be noticed that in the last phase of the development of Sufi system, the Taifa stage, a new social group consisting of landed Sufis emerged leading to a new kind of relationship with each other, as well as with the state and general population. In the Taifa stage use of heredity in place of personal spiritual merit as the basis of succession to the khanqah, was evident. Also, personal fame of an illustrious Sufi, who had been long dead, was frequently used through his dargah to familial advantages. In this way Sufi system was passing through one stage to the next; replacement of the cult of the Path(Tariqa) with a personality cult (Taifa) was an obvious indication of the final stage in the development of institutional Sufism[55]. Involvement of state power in Sufi institutions by awarding permanent grants in land was a new phenomenon in this stage. State policy, from informal patronage, characterised by a ruler's visit to a dargah/ziarat, or engaging famous Sufis as spiritual counsellers, passed on to a formalised political patronage, characterised by the rulers granting rent-free land to selected Sufi families. The grantees, successors and descendants of famous Sufis, were called 'Pirzadah', 'Shaykhzadah', 'Imamzadah', 'Makhdumzadah', etc,.[56]

In the Sultani period Zia Barani gives a detailed account of different grants awarded, and also different type of grantees who

received them. By Shahi farmans la-kharaj land and ajifah/donation in cash were sanctioned by Diwan-i-Risalat to sadr, shaykh, ustad, sufi, hafiz, syyed, alim, khadim, muezzin, khanqahdar, Qalandari, Maleki, Haydari faqirs, and for orphans and disabled. Darkhastpesh/ grants on application, were sanctioned for the maintenance of dargahs, khanqahs, mazars, etc,. Firuz Shah Tughloq issued a farman to the effect that big purses of silver should be taken to the jama mosques and large enclosed places of prayer/idgahs and be distributed in universal charity to all supplicants. At least eight to ten miles away from towns and cities cultivable land was to be given to sufis, Hydari and Qalandari derivishes, astanadar, faqir and mishkin[57]. Barani mentions the ulema separately and specially: '...presents were made to the ulema of the towns, and gifts to the khanqahs of the mashaikhs and offerings to the holders of astanas'.[58]

The provision of the grant of inam area in Bengal's land system has to be studied in this general background of the Sultanate period. In the early stage of occupation (1204-1338) there are instances when ajifah/grant in cash was given to religious dignitaries. Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji (1211- 1226) provided ajifah to Imamzadah Jalaluddin Ghaznavi when he was for a while in the court of Lakhnauti, because, he, being a visiting foreigner, could not be given landgrant[59]. The Qalandari dervishes, who helped Mughisuddin Tughril (1278-1283) in his fight against the imperial power of Delhi, were awarded maunds of gold for their loyalty and support[60]. Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrizi was granted, in his life time, rentfree land and an orchard for the maintenance of his khanqah and the adjoining langarkhana; a rich temple into a taqiya/restplace for him in the port of Deomahal, half of the revenue of which was spent for the maintenance of the Shaykh's khanqah[61]. Later, Ibn Batuta (1346) noticed that the dargah of Shah Jalal in Sylhet was regularly maintained by 'gifts and presents'[62]. But these are stray references to grants; in the early stage, `aymma' system did not yet emerge as an institutionalized form, often than not grants were made to religious personalities rather than to groups, institutions or sufi families. But from the 15th century onwards the importance of the khanqah sufis like Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, Shaykh Alaul Haq, Shaykh Nuruddin Qutb Alam and

others, and their association with the royalty and the ruling class, is clearly evident. From the maintenance of the khanqahs of important sufis to the arrangement of their taking `haj', the Sultani government used to bear all sorts of responsibility and expenditure. Almost hundred years after the death of Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam, by far the most powerful and influencial religious personality of the independent Sultanate and regarded as the patron saint of Bengal, Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) granted as many as forty- seven villages for the maintenance of the dargah and the adjoining institutions belonging to the illustrious sufi[63]. The endowment to the dargah and taqiya of the Shaykh was renewed and extended later, mentioned in the Devkote inscription of Alauddin Hussain Shah (1512) as the renewal of `the pious grants'[64]. There is an interesting addition in the same inscription---the possibility of defrauding the pious legacy has been carefully considered and commented on that 'to prevent such frauds' was the earnest duties of the walis and the qazis'. It is quite likely that false claims were put up by some sufi families and the government officials were made responsible to take care of the problem[65]. Bagha in Rajshahi district was an important pilgrim town in the 16th century because of the presence of the khanqah, and later the dargah of the martyred sufi Shah Daula Shahid. For reasons unknown Shah Daula himself refused to accept the income of forty-two villages granted by Sultan Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah (1519-1532)[66]. But after the death of the Sufi, his son received the same grant for the maintenance of the dargah of his deceased father; the grant was again renewed in the 19th year of the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan as madad- i-ma'ash. Renewal of the old grants, awarded by the Sultans of Bengal, were generally mentioned in the later sanads of the Mughals.[67]

Use of the titles of Pirzadah, Shaykhzadah, Makhdumzadah, Imamzadah, etc., are indicative of hereditisation of madd-i-ma`ash rights, in which cases either la-kharaj land or right of collection of revenue from granted land was given to the families of renowned pirs and sufis. The dargah of these illustrious sufis became centres of public congregations, specially on religious occasions like `urs' and related functions which was visited by rulers and commoners alike;

often than not death anniversary celebrations were accompanied by fairs, which had a commercial aspect, and as such, was attended by very large number of people from all walks of life. Every dargah with its own legend of spiritual power was quite independent of the sufi buried within; from the votive customs the sufi families had considerable income, gained less in cash and more in kind.[68]

Paramount importance of land in the socio-economic organisations of medieval period, and how land could be converted into a machinery to be used to keep control on very large number of people, is quite evident from amlak/aymma system. Often the government wanted to get economic benefit from inamland - sometimes part of the granted land was cultivable and part fallow or uncultivated virgin land, expected to be transformed into cultivable with further expansion of agricultural activities under the grantee families. It is not clearly known how far zamindari rights were affected by the emergence of landed sufi groups in the society who adopted dress, manners, customs, the whole life-style of the nobility, and thus becoming a viable section in the Sultanate ruling class. R.M. Eaton is of opinion that 'their influence on common people was derived from something more fundamental than land. The devotees considered it appropriate that the spiritual power of a deceased Pir be expressed in the material prosperity of his descendants'[69]. The tradition of granting inamland to religious families and institutions went down to the 17th and 18th centuries.In 1690 Emperor Aurangzeb declared by a farman that all madad-i-ma`ash or aymma-i-ummam would become hereditary[70]. In Bengal an old and long legacy of the system is still evident from the names of villages which had once been given as inam-land. In Midnapore district there are atleast six villages, names of which start, with 'aymma', i.e., aymmahabibullah, aymmaqalandar, etc,. There are seven villages in Hooghly district, one each in Burdwan district and 24 Parganahs starting with the same pre-fix. Land grants awarded by zamindars for acquiring religious merit to local Muslim mendicants like faqirs and dervishes are started with `faqiran', `pirottor' and `pirpal' ; quite a number of villages bear the names with these prefixes and suffixes till date. Same tradition was followed regarding Hindu religious persons and

temples names of villages with prefixes or suffixes of 'devottor'/ 'devatra', `brahmatra'/`brahmadeya' etc., are quite common in West Bengal. `Vaishnavottor' land denoted to akhras and astanas was an 18th century addition.[71]

In discussing land system in medieval Bengal a highly interesting document of the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah is available. The Sultan, an Arab by birth, seems to have taken a Persian wife. It is said that he gave his daughter, Raushan Akhtar Banu, of Persian mother, in marriage to Qutb ul Ashageen, whose descendants possessed landed estates in the sarkar of Sonargaon in the Mughal times. It is evident that the estate was made free from governmental interference `on the plea of taxes, government expenses, skilled and forced labour, hunting, raising repeated crops from farms and gardens .... 2 percent for chaudhuri, salami for..... building.... and percentage for qanungo, wali and collector of revenue'. The immunities given to the successor in the renewal sanad might be in continuation of similar advantages enjoyed by original grantee. The granted land seems to be tax-free, and it appears from the content of the sanad that the grantee could not possibly alienate it, nor could he transfer it even to his immediate successor/s. Qutb ul Ashageen's descendant, Syyed Mustafa wanted to transfer the assigned land to his son, Muhiuddin , but even for that right he had to appear before the Mughal authority, in order to get the transfer properly recorded in the form of document duly endorsed by the seal and `tughra' of Emperor Shah Jahan[72]. By analysing this document following are some of the features which come to light:

(i) The estate was rent-free, but not a religious endowment ;

(ii) The right to enjoy the grant was hereditary in nature, because, it continued being enjoyed by the same family ;

(iii) Originally it was not granted in perpetuity, because, for a simple transfer from father to son , approval and endorsement from the government was compulsory ;

(iv) Even to enjoy the right of a rentfree landgrant , original recipient being a Sultan's son-in-law, there could be interference from so many government officers and intermediaries, like wali, qanungo, chaudhuri and other revenue collectors ;

(v) Cash money in various forms like other government expenses, salami, etc., was generally expected to be paid, despite the fact that the granted land could be tax-free.[73]

This estate was awarded to the Sultan's son-in-law, yet from the above mentioned features there is no evidence of its being taken from 'khalisa'. Considering all these facts, it is a possibility that sometimes special grant of land was awarded to relatives of rulers, nobles and important officials for their meritorious service to the court. But this land-grant document cannot be explained by the general categories of iqta, jagir, khalisa, inamland, etc.

In the 13th century the newly established Sultanate could hardly have a stable and strong economic base. But with the territorial expansion and consodilation of growing political authority of the Sultanate, attempts were made to increase the financial resources by collecting taxes on Islamic model. According to Prof. Athar Ali -- 'once formed Islamic political institutions gave immense advantage to the ruling power. The Rajput states of north India (the 15th and the 16th centuries) or the Vijaynagar Empire of the south were Islamic polities without being converted to Islam, while accepting its crucial matters like taxation and state property'[74]. With the establishment of the Sultanate, pre-13th century older fiscal system was not immediately eliminated, it continued to operate, but with superimposition of more demands of the new ruling class. The changing fiscal order must have been replacing the older system gradually from the 13th century, but it has been left unrecorded. Detailed record of sudden imposition of a uniform taxation system over a very large part of northern India is noticed first time in the reign of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316). The similarity of his taxation system to the classic Islamic fiscal order, where kharaj/land-tax was the main tax representing the bulk of agricultural surplus, is quite obvious in the sources. Since the adoption of Alauddin Khalji's revenue organisation kharaj/mal was used as the principal form in which the agricultural surplus was transferred for appropriation of the ruling class[75]. Ghyasuddin Tughloq (1320-1325) gave some concessions to khots and muqaddams to give some relief to the peasantry. But Muhammad bin Tughloq (1325-1351) brought the entire empire,

including Bengal more or less, under rigorous and uniform system of taxation by attempting a substancial increase in the scale of agrarian appropriation.Barani says new additional abwabs were levied on the peasantry and Yahya bin Sirhindi opines that three major taxes were more vigorously assessed and collected. 'It is a paradox that Muhammad bin Tughloq provoked an agrarian revolt of unprecedented intensity by increasing taxation, at the same time he formulated a systematic policy of promoting agriculture'. Firuz Shah Tughloq abolished agrarian cesses, but levied jaziya along with kharaj on the non-Muslim peasantry. Subsequent to him information about agrarian taxation is quite scarce in the official source. Land tax continued to be collected through provincial administrators and through rulers or local hereditary or semi hereditary collectors.[76]

The Delhi Sultanate lost all control over Bengal within less than hundred and fifty years of Bakhtiyar Khalji's invasion and occupation. Independent Sultans were not liable any more to send regular tribute and share of ghanima to the central authority in Delhi nor to keep any official record and account of the revenue collected and to be sent. This is one of the major reasons for the absence of revenue literature in the period under review. Todar Mall's arrangement was more or less based on the available qanungoyi papers of pre-Mughal Bengal. Qanungos were appointed by Sultans to explain and interpret revenue laws; their primary duty was to maintain government records of land and revenue.This is the reason why Abul Fazl says that 'land-tax' is settled between the collector and the raiyat (nasaq). His Majesty, from kindness, has not altered this system.'[77]

In the first hundred and fifty years of Turkish occupation and settlement Khalji amirs and maliks had to depend heavily on plunder of unpacified territories of Hindu rais/ranas. Gradually, with the growth of vassalage system tribute was imposed on the defeated chieftains. Thus the income obtained from plunder and tribute, in cash or kind , was spent on the maintenance of the early ruling class and for the expenditure on the army. Tribute and ghanima, the share of which was to be sent to Delhi, failure or refusal of that duty on behalf of muqtis and walis, was considered to be rebellion; this brought in invasion of Bengal from Delhi Sultans. Minhaj refers to numerous

expeditions led into 'mawas'/rebellious territory to exhort tribute or plunder, mostly in the form of cattle and slave[78]. By the time Bengal became independent of Delhi, the autonomous status of local Hindu chieftains had gone and they became merely tax-collectors of the Muslim government; large tributary areas were being transferred into jagirs. Three major iqtas of Bengal in the early period -- Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon, were integrated into the independent Sultanate. It is very likely that from mid-14th century onward a stable fiscal order and an organized revenue system developed.

Ghanima was one of the main source of income in the early period of Muslim occupation in Bengal.. According to classical economic taxation system, one fifth of the plundered wealth/ghanima was due to the central Treasury and the rest was to be distributed in the Army. Ghanima has been mentioned by Minhaj in reference to Bengal from the time of Bakhtiyar Khalji, but how far the percentage was fixed according to classical Islamic system, is not known[79]. Mughisuddin Tughril (1278-1283) distributed large amount of booty plundered from Jajnagar expedition, among Muslim religious groups to secure their support in his rebellion against Balban. Qadar Khan (1325-1338) wali of Lakhnauti, collected huge amount of silver by plunder ; neither did he send the due share to Delhi, nor did he pay the due to his soldiers. At this his soldiers revolted against him and joined the side of his arch rival, Fakhruddin Mubarak of Sonargaon (1338) . When Nasiruddin Bughra Khan was appointed wali of Bengal, his father Balban gave a sound piece of advice to his son: (i) moderation should be observed in collection of taxes from the subjects; too little amount could encourage them to revolt, too much could make them feel oppressed ; (ii) soldiers should be won over by good treatment ; (iii) officials should be paid adequately[80]. Good treatment to soldiers might have meant regular payment of their due share. This is indicative of the presence of a permanent fiscal order of income and expenditure. From very early period. Ghanima, to be taken as a major source of state income, was very uncertain, because fighting and plundering was neither regularly possible nor necessary.

The classic Islamic concept of kharaj, land tax on non-Muslims ranging from a fifth to half of the produce, and 'ushr', tithe on Muslims,

seems quite alien to the later development of landtax. Ushr completely disappeared, except as a concessionary arrangement with favoured elements and even Muslim peasants had to pay kharaj regularly; and finally it exceeded half of the produce wherever this could be realised[81]. Prof. Athar Ali has shown that it tended to approximate to the surplus or potential rent. 'This enlargement of state demand could take place only by a corresponding destruction of state property', despite the fact that initially, `Islamic Law has a fairly well-developed concept of private property in land'[82]. Kharaj from both Hindu and Muslim peasants became the main source of revenue for the government, iqta system was the official mechanism developed to extract revenue from the occupied areas, although it took quite some time to develop effective administrative machinery for. its regular collection. Prof. Athar Ali observes that the process of conversion created a problem for the state where both subjects and rulers were Muslim, the Muslims had to bear the taxation[83]. If Muslims were to pay only `ushr'/one-tenth of the production, no state could subsist financially. The notion of kharaj as tax on all peasants, comprising the surplus, irrespective of the faith of the tax-payers, came to be propagated by the Hanafi jurists.

In Alauddin Khalji's (1296-1316) taxation system, three main and some other taxes were collected from the peasantry: (i) kharaj, sometimes indifferently called kharaj- i - jezya, although no separate jezya was collected over land tax ; (ii) ziyarat or tax on cultivation ; (iii) charai/tax on milch cattle, and (iv) a general house tax. As for kharaj, all engaged in cultivation, whether of large or small plots of land, were to be subjected to' (the procedure of) measurement (masahat) and (the fixation of) the yield.....' etc,. Rate of taxation was an uniform half of the produce, for everybody as per Islamic law, according to which the highest rate was fixed at half of the produce.[84]

In Bengal, in the period under review, it is difficult to assess the rate of collection of kharaj due to paucity of revenue records. Ibn Batuta (1346) mentions of inhabitants of a town,Habank, who were idolators, and therefore under 'zimma system....', they had to handover to the government half of their cultivated crops and had to pay other

taxes[85]. Wang ta Yuan (1349-1350) observes that the state tax was fixed at two tenths of total produce. He also mentions that the government had the right to impose extra or irregular tax on people[86]. In a 'nishan' Firuz Shah Tughloq (1351-1388) accused Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-1358) of Bengal of exacting unlawful taxes from the people which was definitely un-Islamic. In his ensuing fight against the rebel Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah he gave a call to different religious groups, the umarah, muqaddams and zamindars to join him, and gave them assurance that jagirs, landgrants and wages would be granted to them, over and above what they had already received from Ilyas Shah. Zamindars and muqaddams were promised that tax in cash or kind would be exempted for that year (1353) and for the next year no extra tax would be levied, except the regular and usual taxes collected by Ilyas Shah ; any extra tax which might have been a burden for the people, would be exempted.[87]

In this long declaration, issued by Sultan Firuz Shah Tughloq of Delhi, a general tax pattern emerges without identifying any particular tax: (i) tax could be paid both in cash and in kind; (ii) there was regular tax, as well as (iii) extra or irregular tax; (iv) tax could be both exempted and imposed, in special circumstances, at the will of the Sultan. Firuz Shah did ease down, to a certain extent the rigour of taxation followed by the Sultanate administration by limiting extractions above the kharaj to 4% and forbade the levy of charai and garhi ; also he abolished qismat and abwab (agrarian cesses) . Ironically these lenient prohibitions were followed by his levy of jeziya on non-Muslim population, including the peasantry, although it was separated from kharaj.

Tax was collected with great rigour. Firishta says that in the reign of Saifuddin Hamza Shah (1411-1412) of Bengal 'the rayahs of the country could not draw their heads out of the yoke of obedience and practised no neglect or delay in paying taxes'[88]. In the Bengali literature (of late 15th and early 16th century) there are evidences of how strictly revenue was collected from zamindars and ijaradars by government tax-officials. Tax defaulters were heavily punished, they were imprisoned and physically tortured sometimes. In the reign of Sultan Jalaluddin Fatah ShahYavana Haridas, a famous Vaishnava

leader, was imprisoned by the Muslim mulukpati/local administrator, for not observing Islamic practices. Haridas noticed that in the same prison there were other important people also, who possibly were tax-defaulter zamindars, they were very happy to have Haridas with them and felt relieved (to be saved) from oppressing the 'praja'/ subjects (for collecting taxes)[89]. Gopinath Patnaik (ijaradar/ zamindar?) was cruelly punished when he was put on an axe by a group of twelve (employees from local administration)[90]. Ramachandra Khan, zamindar of Benapole, was arrested with his family, and his caste was destroyed by the Muslim 'ujir' (some kind of tax-inspector), for non-payment of tax to the government[91]. Bhairav Singh, zamindar of Tirhut, was a tributary vassal of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah ; he was deposed and substituted by his son, Bharat Singh, due to his refusal to pay tax to the Sultani government. The Sultan personally went to punish him and forced him to pay the dues. This incident is a reminder of Minhaj's reference to expeditions led into the mawas/rebellious territory to exhort revenue. The difference is that he made this reference to earlier days of the Sultani.[92]

Taxes other than kharaj are available in the sources, but not frequently. Zakat/poor rate has been referred in an early 16th century inscription, although no information is available regarding its regular collection through government agencies[93]. There is no evidence of imposition of jeziya on the non-Muslim population under the Bengal Sultanate, at least not in the period under discussion. In the early stage, consideration of the assistance rendered by the Hindu chieftains to the Muslim authorities in their fight against the imperial power of Delhi, might have led them to take the policy of not imposing jeziya on the Hindus; later this became a fair tradition with ruling dynasties. In this respect Bengal Sultans were not very much influenced by Delhi in their policy matters. When Firuz Shah Tughloq (1351-1388) levied Islamic poll-tax/jeziya on non-Muslim population of the Empire, by that time Bengal had become independent from the imperial control, and it never went back to the influence of the Delhi authorities, at least, in this respect, not in the two hundred years of independent Sultanate period (1338-1538).

Most important source of revenue after land tax was customs duties. From the Chinese sources it is known that port duty used to be collected from Chatgaon. Moqta (Muqata`a)/ijaradari prevalent in the port area of Satgaon has been discussed earlier. The case of Hiranya and Gobordhan Majumdar (majmu`adar) might well have been an example of port-duty along with landtax collected in Satgaon and its hinterland[94]. The Portuguese have already been mentioned as revenue farmers in Satgaon and Chatgaon areas where they set up stations for collection of custom duties.Barbosa mentions that officers were appointed to collect customs duties both on coastal towns and on internal (riverside) towns pointing towards the imposition of duty on internal trade as well[95]. Duties on internal trade carried by river routes was collected from stations which were termed as `kutghats'. Dhamrai inscription of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah (1482) mentions about the official designation of mir-i-bahr/admiral[95].. According to Abul Fazl the duties of mir-i-bahr included the supervision of rivers and collection of duties at ferryghats[96]. Heavy duty was imposed on expensive and luxury items like sandal-wood, both from the sides of Bengal and Orissa. Excise duty was collected, people paid a kind of abwab in `ghati' (ghat/river-bank), and `dani' was paid for crossing river. `Hatkar' was collected from open air markets, `pathkar'/road tax, `ghatkar'/tax on use of riverside embankment have been mentioned occasionally in Bengali literature[98]. Although the term 'charai' has not been mentioned either in the official or in the indegenous sources in Bengal, there is a reference to the collection of some kind of licence fee for keeping horses: in the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah an officer was sent to collect `ghora-mulya' /fee on horse and to send the money to the central Treasury in Gaur.[99]

Different designations of revenue officials of the Sultani government are available in the sources. `Sar-i-gumashta' was the chief revenue officer at the centre under whom there were several other gumashtas. An officer termed as `ujir' in vernacular source seems to be a government revenue inspector ; the information is available in reference to the incident of Ram Chandra Khan, a tax defaulter zamindar of Benapole[100].' Shiqdar' was in charge of a revenue unit (shiq), who collected and submitted surplus revenue to

the provincial governor[101]. 'Arinda', a designation of tax-inspector, whose duty was to go from Gaur to place to place for supervision of collection of revenue to be sent to the central Treasury[102]. It has not been possible to find the root of the word 'arinda' (in Bengali), 'arid' was a term to denote paymaster of the forces; it is difficult to say if there is any connection between the two words. Other officers like qanungo, mustaufi, karkun, darkhastgir, kar-i-farman, etc., assisted the administration in revenue affairs.

It has already been discussed before that the collection of revenue was mostly in the hands of the Hindu officers of the Sultanate. We get several instances in the Bengali literature (early 16th century) to get a glimpse of the system of revenue collection. A system of revenue farming was growing in the early 16th century and an intermediary group, responsible for revenue collection by contract with the government, became rich and influencial[103]. Barani uses the term muqata`a as almost synonymous to 'ijara'. It seems from the vernacular source that ijaradari and zamindari were often overlapping systems. In the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah, the example of Hiranya and Gobordhan Majumdar indicate the pattern of revenue collection :

As ijaradars of Saptagram area they collected twenty lakhs of rupees in revenue out of which they were responsible to pay twelve lakhs to the government; they kept rest eight lakhs for themselves. The Muslim chaudhuri, in this case a local administrator cum revenue supervisor, along with an ujir, went to arrest the ijaradar Hiranya Majumdar. Since both the ijaradar brothers were absconding, they arrested Hiranya's son Raghunath and imprisoned him. According to Krishnadas Kaviraj, the famous Chaitanya biographer, to explain his action the 'mlechha' chaudhuri openly confessed that his main complaint against Majumdar brothers was that he had been deprived of his share from rupees eight lakhs extra money collected by them; it was the only reason for his anger that they kept the entire amount for themselves without sharing it with others. Certain inferences can be drawn from this episode:

(i) There was a large difference in the amount between the tax collected and the tax submitted to the government ;

(ii) The 'extra' collection, over and above the regular revenue, was usually shared by ijaradars/zamindars and revenue officers of the government ;

(iii) If and when the excess collected was not shared there was conflict between the two parties ;

(iv) Both the collectors and the government inspectors did not always follow terms and conditions of the contract or government rules ;

(v) In this case a very large amount of money was involved, because it was a collection from the port area; the reference is towards collection and payment in cash money.

These facts prove that there was an elaborate mechanism for revenue affairs and that tax collection was inspected and supervised quite strictly by a whole set of government officials ; on the other hand direct collectors like zamindars/ijaradars tried to evade sharing extra money. Gopal Chakravarti, a brahman, the arinda of Patshah (Alauddin Hussain Shah) , sent twelve lakhs of rupees to the central Treasury at Gaur from where he was sent to supervise the submission of collected tax; he was uniformly resented and disliked by all. In Vijaygupta haldar Dula and in Kavikankan Mukundaram dihidar Mamud Sharip (Mahmud Sharif), both are depicted as oppressors of the cultivators, the former in the Sultani period, the latter in the Mughal rule.[104]

But the picture was not of an uninterrupted darkness without relief. Tax, on special occasions, could be exempted at the will of the sovereign. Tax exemption, in special circumstances (to get support of vassals and landlords in a war-situation) has already been mentioned in reference to Firuz Shah Tughloq's invasion of Bengal. Alauddin Hussain Shah ordered such exemption for the people of Nabadwip when he declared that they were not to pay any taxes to the government, they were to remain happy to till the soil peacefully[105]. Was it a diplomatic move of the Sultan to placate the protesting Vaishnavas of Nabadwip? Despite quite a few mentions of natural calamities like drought (khara) and famine (durviksha) in the indegenous literature, there is no mention of the government's preharvest loans like 'sondhar' of the Delhi Sultanate and 'taqavi' of

the Mughal period.

Growth of extensive subinfeudation, underfarming and underletting the revenue rights within zamindari jurisdiction seriously hampered the working, and also undermined the spirit of centralized revenue organisation. Throughout the period there was a perennial friction between various types of revenue collectors and assessors and supervisors and inspectors employed by the government. Resistance put up by zamindars and other types of tax-collectors against strict revenue assessment and collection by the government was a frequent occurrence in the Mughal period; but `mawas' and `zortalab' are the two terms which originated and came down from pre-Mughal times[106]. In the start of the consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal Abul Fazl stated that pre-Mughal revenue structure was continued by the grace of the Emperor. 'During eight months of the year they (raiyats) pay the required sums by instalments. They personally bring the money in rupees and gold mohurs to the appointed place, for, the receipt of revenue as the division of grain between the government and the husbandmen is not customary here. The harvest are always abundant, measurement are not insisted upon and revenue demands are determined by estimate of the crop. His Majesty, in goodness, has confirmed this custom[107]. But Abul Fazl's statement regarding revenue system in Bengal can not be accepted unqualified for the following reasons :

(i) Annual payment of revenue in eight instalments could be possible in khalisa area, but not in jagir/zamindari areas ;

(ii) Direct payment by raiyat was not always possible; because, various types of revenue collectors and farmers, including the Portuguese at the end of the Sultani, are present in the sources ;

(iii) Payment in cash, as claimed, such as in 'rupees and mohurs' could not have been possible in the rural economy where metallic currency was not generally used ;

(iv) M.R. Tarafdar opines that the term `taqsim' relates apportionment of produce points to prevalence of crop division ;

Despite Abul Fazl's claim, pre-Mughal revenue system was not continued without changes :

According to poet Mukundaram, a cultivator had very often to

pay in accordance with the number of ploughs used for tilling the plot in his possession. Tarafdar points out that 'as the economy of Bengal was based on agriculture, units of weight used in measuring agricultural products, including food-grains, appeared to have been linked up with land measurement'. It also appears from vernacular source that Todor Mall's changed revenue assessment system (jabti) was being implemented with much rigour that led to the flight of poet Mukundaram, and many others like him, to avoid tax burden. Hardship of the peasantry, caused by forcible land measuring by Mughal revenue officials, was not present in the independent Sultanate period in Bengal.

6

# The Rural Class : The Peasantry And Agrarian Sector

In recent research, R.S. Sharma and others have characterised the period between 600-1200 AD as a distinct phase of feudal formation in which feudal mode of production as a conceptual method has been used to identify and explain important social and cultural developments in Indian history.[1] There are some important characteristics of feudal formation : (i) the society was dominated by a class of landlords who claimed and collected rent from peasants on the ground that the former were owners of land (ii) as a result there developed a subject-peasantry, who actually possessed the land, but were compelled to pay rents in cash, kind or labour to the landlords, (iii) rent and labour service were procured by landlords neither to promote production, nor economic growth, but for their own consumption; (iv) early medieval social formation was based on predominantly agricultural economy in which local needs were catered locally and in this situation the scope of functioning of market system was very limited; handicraft and artisan activities were mainly confined to countryside, artisans were attached either to native villages or to temple-establishments; since there was direct relationship between the local consumers and producers, traders or middlemen did not play any vital role in this

system, they only procûred and supplied tools, implements, oil, spices, etc. ,to the agriculturists. In this system the position of peasantry was much undermined. But despite the weakness inherent in this feudal formation, it gave boost to bring virgin soil under cultivation which hastened the pace of agrarian expansion. New methods were employed to increase cultivability of land by brahmans who received landgrants in backward tracts; agriculture, in this system, was largely sustained and propped up by beliefs and rituals sponsored by brahman land-assignees, also by implementing ceremonial procedure to preserve cattle-wealth, essential for agriculture. Another important feature in the feudal formation of pre-1200 India was, with the growth of a class of subject-peasantry, the introduction of serfdom; serf-peasants were attached to the soil, but did not own it, they could only own cattle, seed and implements.[2] Since early 8th century, serfdom was introduced as a result of the breakdown of slave system and the extension of forced labour. B.N.S. Yadav points out that 'serfdom could not become a model type, yet peasant-subjection of less severe forms, involving exploitative relationship between landlords and peasants appears to have been of wide prevalence.[3] The trend of lower free peasantry getting subsumed under exploitative relations of dependence or subordination, also became a marked feature'. He rejects Prof . Mukhia's contention that the entire 'Indian agrarian history, has been characterised by free peasantry.[4]

When the Turkish conquerors entered this socio-economic scenario through the north to the Indian heartland, the existing feudal system was shaken. Hierarchically the old brahmanical social order was in tact, but in a state of flux, surcharged with social crisis and conflict. This crisis revolved round the question of the extraction of surplus from the producers and its distribution among the ruling class, including the intermediaries. This situation necessitated to create a new system of extracting the surplus, for more effective collection, distribution and appropriation of the new ruling class. Muhammad Habib uses the term 'revolution' in this context to denote radical social and economic change in rural and urban sectors, which implies a total break with the past.[5] Irfan Habib takes a different perspective when he says : 'What the Sultanate brought about was not a social

revolution in a modern sense, but the creation of a new system of agrarian exploitation, with a parasitical urban growth based upon it'. He also says that the denial of rights to the peasants, who remained as semi-serfs, might make the system 'feudal': In lieu of a proper technical name we have no option but to designate economic organisation established under the Sultanate as the 'Indian medieval economy' . To Habib social condition in the Sultanate could not be termed either 'feudal' or 'capitalistic' or even a 'transitional' one.[6] Later he was still looking for a better substitute when he suggested "the Medieval Indian System".[7] Muhammad Habib's comparison of pre-1200 and post-1200 Indian situation clearly brings out the change that had taken place in the medieval Indian polity and society. Like the older society, in this period too, a large share of surplus (half of the produce), created by the peasants, was appropriated by the ruling class. The major difference seems to be that in pre-1200 period the process of cultivation and rural economy was controlled by both the ruling class as well as the local Hindu potentates, whereas the post-1200 Indian rural society had nothing to do with the new urban ruling class, and the peasantry was left at the mercy of rural hereditary chiefs, who, along with local officers , extorted them for more tax. That the peasantry was subjected to more rigorous method of revenue realisation is quite evident from the 'muqatai'/revenue--farming system initiated in the Tughloq period and continued afterwards, besides other taxes, already in force, to be paid by them.[8] Certain changes in the agrarian sector give some idea, of the rights and relationships related to land tenure[9] : (i) emergence of a new trend to the growth of land right in the form of 'khalisa'/treasury land. It will not-be correct to call it 'crownland' - it was altogether a new idea of grants made out of the personal estates, and evidently this trend was on the increase. (ii) according to Irfan Habib ' .... there was little question of the peasants claiming property/ rights over any parcel of land. Land was abundant, and the peasants could normally put up with a denial of his right over the land he tilled, what he feared, on the contrary, was a claim of the superior classes over his crop, more still over his person'.[10] (iii) By implication it means that the peasants had choice to select and inhabit any area at will. But Habib himself

opines that the peasants were not masters of their domicile and were in effect no better than semi-serf —they could own only seed, cattle and implements, and also could sell their produce in order to pay land-revenue in cash. This implies ---(a) restrictions on peasants' mobility; (b) absence of right to free alienation of land; (c) his subjection to the rendering of forced labour, dreaded most, because, it implies possession 'over his person'. (iv) In this context it is hardly possible that the abundance of land was the reason for not claiming property right by peasants. They were 'ground down' and were 'not allowed to leave the land', so it is doubtful whether they were of free-birth/'hurrasl'.[11]

Various methods applied for expansion of cultivable land does not point towards its abundance in this period. The area occupied by forests, jungles, pastures, meadows and also the varied soil types, hardly present an encouraging picture of abundance of cultivable land everywhere. Cleaning of jungles were mostly done around cities and qasbahs mainly to foster urbanisation and to provide safety to the urban population; forests were often cleared to make roads ready for trading purposes, for caravan routes and for the army-in-march. One of the main conditions of religious and secular grants of pre-1200 period was to clear forests to enable the landlords to bring as much land as possible under the plough.[12] In post-1200 period the same trend is visible in taxfree grants (milk, inam, idrar, etc.), grants made on concessional tax-rate and sometimes even zamindari rights were given to assignees to bring more land under habitation and cultivation; but some of these conditions did not carry strong claim over right on land, as was in the case of religious and some non-religious grants; it is not so sure that these grantees were serious enough to adhere to the state policy of reclaiming more land to be brought under cultivation. The quality of cultivable land and its capacity to produce varied from region to region. The capacity of soil to yield more food-grains depended on the strength of fertility it carried, the natural advantage of sufficient rainfall and the irrigation facilities to be created by human effort. These were the constraints which worked against bringing the land in abundance for cultivation. 'The fertility of Indian soil' and its 'high agricultural productivity' will

have to be considered in the context of realisation of land-revenue by the government ; the state policy was to encourage increase of cultivable land to augment the Treasury. The classification of land for assessment of revenue was based, not on the fertility of the soil, but on the continuity of production. This continuity was generally ensured, not on the climatic condition, particularly on uncertainty of rainfall, but on the effort of the government and the by facilitating irrigation, digging of canals, wells, reservoirs, etc., in large numbers wherever and whenever possible. This condition presupposes an intensive cultivation; extensive cultivation was generally linked with the spill over of the population of an intensive zone. Sometimes people of one area left exhausted land for some other new place for easier cultivation. This must have been encouraged by the government, because, it meant some sort of expansion of agriculture, but it also implied social mobility of the cultivators. In case of wet-rice cultivators this could have been more difficult.

There is another indication of the possibility of not having enough cultivable land, attempts to assert rights on it by Hindu potentates were bound to increase and strengthened further. They had been enjoying right on land long before the Sultanate was established. 'The struggle between the Hindu chieftains and the central authority of the Delhi Sultanate was nothing but the continuation of an old story of power-struggle to retain and enjoy rights and privileges that went along with land at its base'.[13] It has been conclusively proved that in pre-1200 northern India private individuals possessed land. It is, therefore, hardly possible that the right was taken away by the Sultanate government soon after its authority was established and that the peasant reconciled to live upto the changed situation, i.e., 'he could normally put up with the denial of his right over the land he tilled'. Land right became clear in the Sultanate period through certain factors: (i) production of cash-crops and growth of commercial agriculture in some centres was a part of this process; (ii) trade in agricultural commodities was facilitated;(iii) trade spread in rural areas with greater speed and force than in 'the classical age' of Indian feudalism; (iv) right to sale,purchase and mortgage should have been possible in this situation; (v) Alauddin Khalji's indictment against the

local Hindu intermediaries (khot, muqaddam, chaudhuri, etc.,) clearly implies that besides these intermediaries, ordinary peasants also owned land; there would otherwise have been no other reason for the Sultan to charge the intermediaries with throwing burden upon the weak.'One of the important difference between the pre-1200 and post-1200 India is that in former period right in land was clear and strong, although it might not include sale and purchase, whereas in the latter period the centralised polity gave little scope to claim stronger right in land, because, it could be resumed by the state anytime.[14]' The rural problem which emerged in this period relates to the question of appropriating agricultural surplus in which the new ruling-cum-consumer class was much more interested than in the technical question of who had the real ownership of land. Even the appropriation of agricultural surplus was not a new phenomenon it did exist in pre-1200 period, maybe with different method of appropriation for different type of ruling class.[15]

Thus it is to be noted that in rural areas traditional holdings were marginally upset by the social transformations. Generally settled population lived in the countryside. Rural-urban relationship in pre-Mughal India depended largely on the amount of consumption by non-producer urban class.[16] How the revenue surplus was acquired, through kharaj from iqtas has been already discussed in detail. Surplus in kind was transported to owners by grain-merchants, mandis, hattas and katras were used as contact places between the producer and the consumer. Thus growth of urban centres were heavily dependent on agrarian surplus. There was diversified pattern of agricultural products, not only cereals, but fruits, vegetables, cotton, indigo, etc,. Although there was a distinct shift to commodity producing economy, yet it was largely dependent on agricultural produces, like cash-crops: oil seeds, indigo, cotton, mulberry, sugar-cane, wool, hides and skins, dry fruits, etc,. Rural produces were taken to towns for processing, selling, buying and distributing. This interdependence of rural areas and urban centres led to constant change in village society. This contact was maintained through intermediaries and local officials, and the most significant factor in this regard was the marginalisation of peasants and cultivators; in this long chain of contacts the peasants

mattered the least. The assignees, belonging to the nobility, realised much from their iqtas than what was demanded of the peasantry. The load of tax imposed on them by the iqta-assignees could not be controlled always by the central authorities whose only concern was to collect revenue according to 'jama'. This situation is a clear indicator of a relationship between the exploiter and the exploited based on the extent of control over collection, distribution and consumption of surplus. Muhammad Habib calls this joint control system as 'the organized anarchy of the rural intermediaries' which reigned supreme in the countryside.[17] There was some indications of breakdown in the rural economy at some places, such as open defiance of nobles to the centre and occasional signs of unrest among rich peasantry. Irfan Habib makes an important observation when he says that in the Sultanate period 'towns had probably little to send back to the villages in exchange; they did not also need to, since the taxation system assured all the time a heavy balance of payment in favour of the towns, which were the headquarters of the sultans and the ruling class'.[18] In short, rural-urban relations was one way traffic, the only purpose of which was to appropriate agricultural surplus for urban consumption[19]. The mechanism of iqta system used for collection of land tax, the role of the intermediary class, the zamindars, chaudhuri-khot- muqaddams, revenue officials and the appropriators, have been discussed before.

Revenue organisation and tax-pattern in the period under study have already been discussed in detail. Following are some of the salient features recaptured in the context of the present topic :

(i) The changing fiscal order was gradually replaced from the late 13th century, but left almost unrecorded. Main purpose behind this change was to generate more economic power into the hands of the new ruling class.

(ii) Imposition of an uniform taxation system over a large part of northern India is first recorded in the reign of Alauddin Khalji; kharaj/ mal was devised and used as the principal form by which agricultural surplus was transformed for the appropriation of the urban ruling class.

(iii) Under the Tughloqs, Sultan Ghyasuddin gave some

concessions to khots and muqaddams to provide relief to the peasantry. But Sultan Muhammad brought the entire empire, which included Bengal also, under rigorous and uniform taxation system by substantially increasing the scale of agrarian taxes, at the same time, formulated a policy of promoting agriculture. Firuz Shah abolished agrarian cesses, but levied jeziya, along with kharaj, on the non-Muslim peasantry which was not imposed in Bengal later.

(iv) In the Sultanate period, it was a generally accepted pattern where kharaj, collected from both Hindu and Muslim peasants, became the main source of revenue for the government, and iqta system was developed as an official mechanism by which land -revenue was extracted from occupied areas and the surplus was shifted to urban centres for the appropriation of the ruling class, its dependents and retainers.[20]

In Bengal, even less official revenue literature is available. Ibn Batuta (1346) noticed that the Zimmis (in the sense of non-Muslims) paid upto half of the crops and other extra taxes to the government.[21] Wangta Yuan (1349) mentions the state-tax fixed at one-fifth of the total produce and the government had the right to levy extra tax. He also says that these peasants owed all their peace and prosperity to themselves, by their devotion to agriculture; even forest land was reclaimed by them with labour and toil in tilling and planting.[22] A sort of tax-pattern is available in Firuz Shah Tughloq's 'nishan': (a) tax could be paid both in cash and kind; (b) tax could be imposed and exempted at the will of the sovereign; (c) government had the right to impose extra tax on special circumstances. In Firuz Shah's 'nishan' his enemy Ilyas Shah of Bengal was blamed for exacting unlawful tax which was regarded as 'unIslamic'.[23] The rigour with which tax was collected in the reign of Saifuddin Humza Shah (1411-'12) has been mentioned in Firishta.[24] That the 'prajas'/subject-peasantry was oppressed to pay tax in the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah has been indicated in Vaishnava biographical literature.

These informations lead us only to a partial account of what was the real situation faced by the peasantry, because, the central idea in the mention of revenue collection is related to the problems generated by intermediatires, government officials and other collectors, the

actual presence of the peasant is marginal in this scenario. However meagre, we get informations from these sources about division of land as revenue units, revenue organisations and mechanism of collection of landtax, weights and measures, jarib system and particularly, detailed account of rights and duties or lack of it, of different categories of revenue collectors in the administrative system.

Recently much attention has been devoted to the social framework of agriculture. In the official structure the peasant is reflected only as a primary producer whose sole duty was to act as a taxpayer to zamindars/governments, the human content of his existence is no part of it; he is not considered as a social being, as one of the innumerable toiling masses in a very old agrarian society. In medieval Bengali literature we have the rare opportunity of getting a glimpse of the life of ordinary people in general and peasant-life in particular. In this rich literature, through gods and goddesses, saints and sages, pirs and paighambars, the life of common man has been depicted symbolically, ideally, and also realistically. Actually, almost all of them, despite their superimposed divinely attributes, are true representatives of an agrarian culture. Use of literature as a source of history is still a highly controversial area, the two major problems being the determination of chronology and the differentiation between the ideal and the real.[25] In this situation there is no way out but to follow a thematic approach, and of course chronological as far as possible,(in the use of literary source) : (i) to consider the age old tradition in agrarian system and peasant -life; (ii) to check chronology by linguistic determinant used in literature; (iii) to check informations available in literary source from other corroborative sources; (iv) to be aware of the use of myths in sources like Smriti literature; (v) by all other means of corroboration. In the history of Bengali literature there is a big gap between the Charyapadas of the 10th-llth centuries and the works of the 15th century. To bridge this gap (a) epigraphic source is very valuable, particularly regarding land system, (b) for ideology (brahmanical) and myth-based social laws, Smriti literature can be useful, specially for varna and jati structure in the early period, (c) from Mangal Kavyas, (d) Vaishnava biographies, goswami shashtras, padavalis, (e) Tantric and Sufi works, etc., we may not

get detailed informations regarding landless labourers; considering this factor, (f) folklore may be an useful source[26] -- this includes folk literature, custom, belief, and superstitions - in these informations are available regarding landless labourers, detail of quality of land, method of cultivation, irrigation and nature dependence, number of crops cultivated, names of grains, vegetables, fruits and cash crops produced, means of preservation of grains, even pesticide and insecticide[27]. Above all, genuine and spontaneous expression of poverty and privations of peasant-life is graphically depicted in this source. Apart from thematic approach to peasant life and agriculture, folklore maybe considered as a source of oral history, which is fast becoming a formally acceptable technique to throw some light to the unknown areas, belonging inevitably to the lowest rung of the social ladder.[28]

The first and foremost query which arises here is who is a peasant? - the definition of the term 'peasant' . In this regard very important questions have been posed by Prof. Irfan Habib: (a) Is he a person who cultivated the land he occupied or possessed? or (ii) a person who undertook agriculture on his own, working with his own implements, and using the labour of his family, without considering so much the question of the control over land?[29] These are naturally the most important questions when 'peasant' is considered as an economic being in social context. It is not expected to get categorical answers to these questions in the literary source and folklore, but attempt could be made to see what informations relevant to this construct come out of sources other than official.

Etimological order is a very important aspect of literature. In Hari Charan Bandyopadhyay's famous Bengali lexicon the definition of peasant is 'a person who tills the soil to produce crops, whose occupation is cultivation, who earns his living by cultivating land'.[30] This definition has been derived from older Sanskrit dictionaries taken from the root of the word 'Karshak/Krishak' in Bengali. In this definition peasant is simply presented as a primary producer, this does in no way explain him in any other capacity. But in medieval vernacular literature he is depicted, if not explained, in different capacities, by his activities, his way of life and accordingly, in different

terms: when he is a tax-payer the terms often used are rayat/praja/ paraja, etc., we find him here to be in the category of subject-peasantry.[31] When he is just a primary cultivator, the terms used are chasha/chashi/krishak/kisan, etc., here he is determined by his occupation only and remains unexplained by any other activity. The term 'khetua' maybe simply explained to denote a person who works in the field; but it becomes complicated when 'khetua' is equated to 'nafar' which implies domestic labour. It is a possibility that 'khetua' was a land-labourer who had to work for landlord's family and home, as well as in the master's field. 'Dasa' and 'dasi' were also sort of domestic slaves; there is no proof in the source that they compulsorily worked in the landlord's field. Thus it is quite apparent that within the peasantry there was a clear hierarchical pattern evident in the economic differentiation of the terms from pradhan-mandal to khetua-nafar, almost identical to khot-muqaddam to balahar-dhanuk of Barani.

D.D.Kosambi was the first to observe an irresistable co-relation between peasant economy and caste structure, particularly after the adoption of the method of wet rice cultivation.[32] In post-1200 period castes contnued to proliferate in the society. So it is a relevant question to ask about the social status of peasant in the jati-varna structure. In the Bengal society, in the13th century it is noticeable that tilling the soil, or for that matter any manual work, was considered to be the occupation of the shudras. In the old Smriti literature originally peasant was included in the vaishya varna, but the vashyas gradually shifted to trade, business , mahajani, and craft; artisanship, cattlerearing, agriculture-all these became shudra profession. From (the 13th to the 14th centuries) the two upapuranas, Brihaddharma Purana and Brahmavaivarta Purana, it is known that the whole caste structure was divided into two - at one end was the brahman and at the other end the antyaja and asprisya, and in between all were considered to be shudra.[33] Also, in Bengal, excepting brahman all others were born of 'varna-sankar' or mixed in jati composition. In Brihaddharma Purana among the 36 mixed jatis (listed 41) peasant/ cultivator has been termed as 'dasa'. But as late as in the 16th century Mukundaram has included krishak and gorakshak in vaishya varna. It is interesting to note that in Brahmavaivarta Purana there is no

mention of peasant in the divisions of either 'sat' or 'asat' shudra; but other agricultural(cash crops) producers like 'toulik' (producer and dealer of supari) and barui/barujibi (producer of betel leaves) have been included.[34] From this it may be inferred that agriculture as an occupation was so generalised that it was not included in the list of brittis related to jati system [35] : (a) This also is an indication that people from more than one jati joined cultivation as a way of living ; (b) cultivation of land was not a specialised hereditary profession like craftmanship or artisanship; (c) sometimes agriculture was a seasonal occupation, and thus could be taken up as part-time work by artisans and craftsmen; (d) but the main question still remains unanswered - if land was not 'abundant' then how could the occupation of cultivation attract and accomodate so many different jatis?

The idealised situation presented in the Smritis and upapuranas regarding varna-jati structure in reality presented more social mobility as far as primary producers were concerned.[36] In the late Pala period the kaivartas/fishermen became a politically powerful social group in Bengal. They even rebelled against the Pala state and achieved temporary success. Later on a part of the community joined agriculture and was called 'mahishya' in Bengal. Another section which cultivated mulberry for silk production was termed as 'tunte-kaivarta'. Among the Nabashakhs, the mahishyas remained an influential group; despite all these they could not acquire the right to be attended by 'shuddha' brahmans. It has already been pointed out that 'toulik', 'barui' and 'ambuli' were influencial subcastes. In the inscriptions of the Sena period 'supari'/betelnuts and 'paan'/betel leaves seem to have been considered as cash-crop; in a later stage 'ambuli' and 'barui' , the producers of both the objects, became separate jatis.[37] Mukundaram mentions about 'halik-gope/ploughman-cum-milkman.[38] Another good example is the 'teli' community, oil producer - cum - cultivator group. The term 'kabashe'/cotton producer is a significant one - in medieval Bengal textile was an important exportable commodity. The term 'kabashe-chashi' indicates 'karpas'/ cotton-cultivator; we know from the Chinese source of the early 15th century that weavers were field - cultivators as well.[39] In the same way, sharkara-/sugar was produced in plenty and like cotton sugar-

cane was a cash-crop; but its producers were also engaged in cultivation of paddy. From these informations it maybe pointed out that the peasantry as a social group was mixed in composition and they could perform more than one activities at the same time, with the mainstream or part-time activity of field-cultivation. Thus it is to be noted that in the medieval period there was some kind of social mobility present within the peasantry; in a much later stage (17th century) of Bengal society, despite being originally landless, by bringing fallowland into cultivation, a group 'bhumija' claimed ownership and landed 'kshatriya'(=bhumija-khshatriya) status in the 'Nabashakh' to raise themselves in the society.[40] But this case must have been very rare. It is noticeable that among the producer-groups cultivators of cash-crops acquired better and separate social status in the jati structure.[41]

In the 'upper level' literature peasant has been depicted as a social-labourer -'chasha', 'chashi', 'chashare'- all are used in a detrimental sense. 'Mahachasha bata', 'chashabata' , even 'dasa' have been used to denote peasant and cultivator. Serf or semi-serf position of peasant has been indirectly indicated in vernacular literature of the independent Sultanate period. Bipradas Piplai (second half of the 15th century) mentions that in the field of the lord hundred kisans were employed. Is it an indication of zamindar/rich peasant having his land cultivated by a large number of landless labourers/ serfs? In the same work (Manasavijaya) we find, a peasant, highly skilled in field-work (kheshtra-karma) was to get food thrice a day, four pieces of cloth and monthly pay of one tanka; this was of course, only during the period of cultivation. But landlords used to bargain with poor peasants-- they never got monthly pay in cash, only one piece of cloth instead of three, but food thrice a day.[42] In a 17th century work we find in every detail how land labourer were being supervised in cultivation work in the field by landowner.[43] Peasant, being mentioned in derogatory terms, his occupation in detrimental sense, is not present in folk lores -he is depicted as a poor, nature-dependent kisan, an oppressed toiling person. When he has been considered as 'raiyat'/tax payer, he is the most affected. It was at the point of revenue arrangement that the administration touched the

life of the peasantry most directly. In the revenue system of the Sultani period land tax, collected from the peasantry, reached the government treasury through different agencies which was created as a class of intermediaries between the state and the cultivators.[44] There are clear evidences in the vernacular literature that kharaj was collected regularly and strictly from the subject -peasantry[45]. Kharaj was a tax on the produces to be payable either in cash, kind or labour; prajas were oppressed to pay the land-tax, but what kind of right they had on land and or cultivation, what was their share on the crop they produced in case of crop division, how much tax they paid -these questions can not be answered clearly from literary sources, but there are indications of prajas /raiyats being oppressed by intermediaries, kisans being exploited by big farmers or landlords, and in later sources, there are mentions of forced labour or 'begar'. In the Sultanate period there are more than one instances of draught, rise in prices, and famine in the vernacular source.[46] On special occasions tax was exempted, as it once happened in the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah. But any kind of official relief in the time of natural calamity has not been recorded in any sources.

Peasants acquired some social status in caste ridden Indian society through Bhakti movement which spread to a large part of the sub-continent ; thereby creating a congenial atmosphere for vertical mobility. It also proves that in Bengal society the latent opposition to sanskritilization was still on. With the advent of Sri Chaitanya (1486-1533), through his Gaudiya reform movement a perceptible change is evident in the society. Traders, influencial bureaucrats and territorial-lords were important supporters of his movement. Some of the landlords, like Ramananda Roy, Prataprudradeva of Orissa, were Chaitanya's disciples; Raja Divya Singha of Laur in Srihatta was a devotee of Advaita Acharya; later on Bir Hambir, Raja of Vishnupur, was converted to Vaishnavism by Srinivas Acharya; the local rajas of north Bengal became disciples of Narottom Dutta, and Shyamananda was the guru of the bhuians. In this long list of supporters the peasants are either not mentioned or not included (16th century~17th century). According to a Vaishnava legend, Birbhadra, the son of Nityananda, converted a very large number of 'nera-neri'/

Buddists into Vaishnava faith. Sahajiya Vaishnava cult, influenced by Tantra, as well as Sufi mysticism, percolated deep down in the society and reached the masses at the lower level; this gave birth to 'Jat Vaishnava samaj'. At this level the primary producers were included in a very large scale, which has been later reflected in the Census Reports (1870).

The fall of the independent Sultanate (1338-1538), the Afghan flight and onslaught, the Mughal-Afghan rivalry for supremacy in Bengal, the Portuguese entry in the economic scenario - all led to widespread chaos and anarchy in the society which has been duly reflected in the literary sources[47]. The system of giving 'patta'and taking 'qabuliyat' from the raiyats has been mentioned in this source. In the Mughal rule imposition of new land-measurement/jarib and the rigidity of tax collection are also reflected in literature.[48] It is possible that the dihidars were forcibly imposing the 'jabti' according to Todor Mall's system.[49] From the autobiographical reference in Mukundaram<1594> it is evident that rural Bengal was reeling under the oppression of zamindars, /taluqdars, niyogis and chaudhuris. Order and security was disturbed in rural life by amin, dihidar, shiqdar, etc,. Factors undermining the position of the peasantry are available in the sources: oppressed prajas were selling agricultural implements ~ an item, the real value of which was one tanka, was sold at eight annas only. Mukundaram<1594> had to leave his native village to escape from tax-oppression; the prajas also wanted to leave, but could not.[50] Twenty years before that poet Chandravati writes in 1575 that people left villages in fear of tax-collectors, the prajas were getting ruined.[51] Ramdas Adak (early 17th century) also left his ancestral village to avoid paying tax. In both Ramdas Adak's 'Anadi Mangal' and Sitaram's 'Dharma Mangal' (early 17th century) there are instances of 'begar'/forced labour which they dreaded most because it implied possession over their persons; prajas were being caught by roaming sipahis and piyadas for their failure to pay tax.[52] One can not but note this new trend in literature, reflecting post-sultanate period economic changes.

Even in this uncertain situation new settlements were being founded on the other side of the Bhagirathi; zamindars were making

effort to acquire fresh zamindari rights; they were emerging in different roles at the same time. In Mukundaram's description of the newly founded city of Gujrat we get some idea of the tenent-zamindar relationsip.[53] Zamindar was giving patta to the prajas to confirm rights. Mukundaram says that the prajas paid rent, not on the basis of the produce or of the area of land cultivated, but according to the number of ploughs used. It is interesting to note here that one of the inscriptions of Ahmad Shah, Sultan of Gujrat(1452) mentions the granting of six ploughs of rent-free land to an official named Malik Sha'ban. In some cases zamindars appeared in the role of money-lenders, also they gave seeds and implements on loan; 'tola' from shopowners and 'dhuti' from prajas were collected by the tax-collectors[54]. There is clear reference to subtenure being given to middle class (educated) Kayastha families by Bulan Mandal, the pradhan of the raiyats. This was regretted by the kayastha mahajan Bharu Dutta and he complained to the founder of the city that the peasant, who had been almost his slave, at one time, had now turned a' deshmukh' ![55] Remission of tax was generally not allowed- 'te sani inam'/triennial remission has been mentioned once.[56] In this economic context those who worked in the field were the most marginalised social group.

Some information regarding land measurement is available in literary source. In division of rural space orchards, water-tanks, roads with wayside trees, forests, pastures, cremation ground, market place, land at the proximity of canals and rivers, hills and mountains, etc., could not be taxed; all these were natural resource and as such considered as public property. A very old tradition of land division in Bengal was separation of cultivable land (kshetra) by earthen ridges (aal/ail). A big plot of land was defined by the word 'bakuri'[57] Bipradas Piplai (15th century) mentions about a 'bakuri' being tilled with ploughs by kisans.[58] From the ancient times 'nala'/pipe was used for measuring land; in pre~1200 period two types of nalas were used for this purpose: (i) 'samatatiya' and 'brishavashankar'; it can not be made out from the sources what was the difference between the two. 'Sribrishavashankar' was used as honorific title from Vijaysena to Viswarupasena; the length of the nala used in this period was 56

hands. Since the time of the Guptas two words 'dronobyapa' and 'kulabyapa' were used for land-measurement. From 'kulabyapa' the word kura/kuri has been derived in Bengali. Bipradas Piplai has also used the word 'kuri' which amounted to 20 kathas of land (making a bigha).[59] This system worked upto the middle of the 15th century. With the coming of the Mughals this system was drastically changed; 'nala' was replaced by rope/dara/dari which was measured, supplied and used by the local revenue officers. According to Mukundaram, prajas were being doubly cheated by dihidar Mamud Sharip<Mahmud Sharif> - once when 'khil'/arid land was being recorded as 'lal'/ irrigable land, and second time when land was being measured by rope and a 20-katha plot was recorded as 15 kathas.[60] Citing this case Mukundaram blames the administration for bringing down disaster to the prajas. In Mughal administration measurement of 'kankut' area and accordingly 'jama', was enforced very strictly.

Irrigation system was the most vital factor for the cultivators. In vernacular literature there is a mention of well-irrigation, but no mention of Persian wheel. Three methods are evident in folk literature: (i) water drawn directly from river, canal, reservoir, etc., and sent by ridge to field; (ii) water drawn from deep well by rope and pitcher and sent through ridge to field; (iii) water drawn by 'ghatiyantra'/arghatta or 'donga' from tank/reservoir and sent directly or through ridge to field. How much water was needed for a particular plot of land was decided by two factors; (i) by physical characteristics, for 'jangal' or high land 16 dronas of accumulated rain-water was considered sufficient, and for 'anupa' or low land 24 dronas was required.[61] In southern and northern parts of Radh region there was an ancient system of preserving water in a big reservoir called 'ahar', throughout the year its water was used only for irrigation purpose. From the 16th century, for some unknown reason, this system is absent in the sources[61]. In the 16th century from Vrindavandasa it seems that rainfall was the main source of water for irrigation - 'if there is no rainfall due to curse of gods, crops are destroyed and then no other source of income remain's.[62] Folk songs and ballads are full of yearnings for rains, and in case of its failure, lamentations, prayer to gods and nature does not follow any

conventional creeds - it is the expression of the urge and agony of both Hindu and Muslim peasants - in their songs they belong to cultivator-community and their religion is cultivation.[63]

In vernacular literature we get details of the process of cultivation, names of agricultural produces and implements used. In 'Chashpala' in Shivayan, the god Shiva (originally a member of the Trinity in Hindu Pantheon but here a folk god) is the true representative of the peasantry.[64] He has been depicted in different roles: a landless /field-labourer begging for land from Indra and seeds from Kuber/ the Divine storekeeper in Paradise; he is a kisan who cultivates on the basis of crop-division; he gets a small plot of land from his father-in-law at the time of marriage to Parvati which is insufficient for feeding his big family; he is a farmer supervising cultivation done by others on his behalf. The whole process of cultivation has been described step by step : first step - the land is to be tilled (karshan) at least four times; second step - three more times to eliminate weeds and grasses; third step - then let it dry for a while to take out pebbles and other hard things (niran); fourth step - to make the field even (moyi); fifth step - to divide the plot by ridges; (aal/ali); sixth step - spreading seeds (bapan); seventh step - planting the seedlings in even rows (ropon). Rites and rituals are being performed to do away with pests and insects from the field - leeches are a crucial problem to the kisan working in the field. Even Raja Janaka of Ramayana (in Bengali translation) has been depicted as a big farmer ploughing the land emerged as 'char' (from the change of the course of river).[65] In Syyed Sultan's 'Navivamsha' the first prophet Adam is a ploughman, being helped in cultivation by his wife, Hava, and Zibrail himself.[66] Thus we see that in medieval Bengali literature from mythological figures like Shiva and Janaka to the first prophet of Islam, all are competent cultivators and true representatives of agrarian community and culture in the Delta.

Undoubtedly paddy was the most important crop- in Charyapadas there is mention of 'aman dhan'. Bengali literature, folklore, etc., are replete with reference to rice rituals.[67] We know from other sources that it was an exportable item. In the southern part of Radh region there was ample production of cotton/karpas, and the land was termed

as 'kabase', the crop 'kapafasala'. In the Madanpara inscription of Visvarupasena there is mention of 'boro' being cultivated in low-land/anupa area near river-banks.[68] Sugarcane/ikshu/aakh was also widely cultivated and it was a cash-crop. In medieval Bengali literature there are frequent mentions of sweets and sweet-products made from sugar and jaggery; there is little doubt about the fact that sugar was produced in profusion. Mukundaram mentions about 'modak pradhan Rana' processing sugar in a 'karkhana'.[69] Names of implements made of 'sal' wood for squeezing out juice from sugar-cane are also available. The Portuguese noticed that high quality sugar was produced and exported from Bengal. Names of other agricultural produces are available: oil-seeds like sarsap/mustard and teel/sesame, both black and white, were used for getting oil, processing of which was some sort of cottage industry. There is mention of wheat, but not too often; Lochondasa mentions of 'roti'[70]. Ashtakalai/eight types of lentil were quite popular: urid, mash, batul, mug, masur, barbati, teori, moth, and chhola. Jute was cultivated and used as textile - 'pattavastra', 'patchhara' and 'khuian' - the last named one a rough material for the rural poor. 'Paan' and 'gua'/supari were used in religious and social ceremonies, as well as in day-to-day life.[71] It has been already discussed that betel- leaf cultivators, the baruis, formed an influential 'jati'/subcaste. Names of spices are available: hing/asfoetida, jeera/cumin, haridra/turmeric, and very special and costly items like zafran/kasturi, karpur/camphor and kumkum for colour and flavour. Although it is not an agricultural product, strangely enough edible salt was a rarerity. In Charyapadas it has been said that a person who is able to get 'saindhab lavan'/rock salt worh one tanka, even if he is a pauper he will feel like a prince.[72] According to Mukundaram, chandals used to sell salts going from door to door ; his hero is asking his wife to take loan of four cowries for buying salt. But 'dhanya'/paddy was the queen of all crops; there are more than hundred names of 'dhan' available in literature, not only to determine types by flavour, colour, amount of yield, etc., but also names given just for endearment.Goddess of the field Kshetralak-shmi has been conceived by poets wearing ornaments made of 'dhanya'. Rice was used for different types of snacks : khayari, muri,

chura, hurum, khoyi, etc,. The taste, the flavour, the colour, different preparations of rice has been given more than due attention by poets and writers; but this aspect is totally absent in folk literature - the kisan was concerned with cultivation only and how to save his crop to be safely brought home.

Different ways were adopted to preserve grains, cotton, etc,. The names of containers to save the grains from rats and mice, pests and insects, an acute post-harvest problem, are available in the sources. Some of the containers in which grains and cotton were preserved: 'marai' for paddy, 'dole' and 'malu' for cotton and oilseeds. Marai was generally made of hay and earth, and dole and malu from wood and caine. Informations are also available regarding the method of enhancement of the growth of fruits, vegetables and grains ; in the sayings of Dak and Khana informations are given as how to read the indications of nature (khshetra tattva).

Rural life has been graphically depicted in the proverbs and sayings of Dak and Khana; these are generally accepted as traditional medieval folk (loukik) source, but not oral (moukhik).[70] Khana's sayings have been divided into four parts: (i) The idea of applied astrology in agriculture<jyotishtattva>; (ii) experience in climatic and weather conditions<ritutattva>; (iii) place of tradition and custom in actual fieldwork (kshetratattva); (iv) care of crops and preservation of grains; in this part there are valuable suggestions on the use of home-made natural fertiliser.[73]

The genre of literature which we discussed as source till now fail to provide any information regarding the cultivators in the field - the problems they faced in cultivating land, method of cultivation, agricultural implements and produces, and last of all, their day-to-day life and the part agriculture played in their consciousness - the agrarian culture as a whole. For this purpose we have to turn to folklore. In the folklore an ageold rich and varied agrarian culture is reflected. Various aspects, natural and social, which influenced the perception and lifestyle, made impact on the consciousness of the rural folk, are scattered all over. The most important factor was their response towards nature - it was not their enemy that they would fight it, on the contrary, it was the inexhaustible source from

which they earned their living, depended for their existence. They accepted the destructive power of nature as inevitable fate (niyoti). At the lower level of the peasantry faith rested on custom and belief, and not on any institutionalized religion. From this emerged a kind of animism/sarvapranavad - in which even agricultural implements were worshipped, marai with dhan was equated to Lakshmi, bull and cow were related to Shiva and Durga - an attempt to relate the agrarian symbolism to mainstream religion.[74] All ceremonials and fairs associated were harvest festivals when powers of nature like raingod Indra and god of light Surya were worshipped in the forms of folk deities with local names.

In folk literature there is a special form which is called 'baromasi'/saga of the twelve month cycle, which describes the miseries of rural life month by month in a year. Dussan Zbavitel has divided the baromasis in five categories and the oldest examples have been termed as 'krishaker baromasi' or the twelve month cycle in the life of the peasants.[75] In these baromasis there are indications of landless field labourers as well as big farmers, mention of 'dofasali', even 'tefasali' land, and monthwise description of cultivation, production and harvesting. It is to be noted here that the baromasis were originally related to the life cycle of women : productivity of land and its fertility being symbolically equated to female and male forms, land and sky are coupled together - sky is male who gives rain and land is female whose fertility is enhanced by rainwater for the ultimate productivity. These are the ancient ideas which gave birth to fertility- cults and associated rituals in every part of the world. Later on these baromasis turned into a stereotyped form of lamentation of women in absence of their husbands; but the annual cycle always remained a true depiction of the poverty and privations suffered by women in the rural society.

Since the time of the Charyapadas the same old story is repeated, the story of non-availability of food - no rice to eat, living by eating wild fruits and greens, dilapitated shelter made of mud and palm leaves or hay, almost uncovered body by just a small piece of jute material/'khuian', no utensils, rice, when available, eaten from floor and water from earthen pot, even starch from boiled rice

(amani) taken as meal. It is a possibility these are the realities in the life of landless field-labourers, but the actuality of the poverty and privations of certain sections in the rural society can not be ruled out.[76]

The coming of the Turkish conquerors and the Islamization of polity altered to a large extent the physical and social landscape of rural Bengal; it was a long story of continuity and change. The most fundamental change is noticed in the social sphere was the emergence of Muslim peasantry. From the 13th century to the 16th century Bengal's Muslim society was predominantly urban - thus as far as they were present as rulers and administrators, sufis and ulama, traders and merchants and adventurers and soldiers. But the most significant part was played by the Muslim community happened to be in the role of common cultivators who pervaded rural Bengal for centuries to come. Long before the partition of India, Bengali peasants formed the basis of one of the largest Muslim communities in the world. The formation of Muslim peasantry raises the question of Islamization and the controversial issue of conversion. R.M. Eaton has discussed the issue in detail and he offers four conventional theories of Islamization of the Indian sub-continent which have been put forward by scholars, as being: immigration theory, religion of the sword thesis, theory of patronage and social liberation theory. The first three do not explain mass conversion at the rural level that took place along the political fringe. Only the fourth one- the theory of social liberation, can give some clue to explain large-scale conversion at the lower order of the society.[77]

In the historiography of Islamization of Bengal few attempts have been made to establish how and when Islam became a mass religion, the Muslim peasant community first emerged and became a significant factor in the society. It is not easy to prove from the primary source materials when and how the Muslim peasantry, which comprised of the main bulk of the population of pre-partition Bengal, to have originated in the distant past. With but one or two exception of 16th century reference in foreign sources to the Muslim population in Bengal, all mention only urban Muslims in the elite society. But analysing the Ghazi Traditions and Sufi literature we have already

noticed that in the early period of Turkish occupation in the Delta, the Ghazi-pirs entered rural Bengal, colonised and propagated Islam. In the Sufi literature there are references of the success of the preachers in spreading the faith. Ibn Batuta, as early as in the 14th century, recorded that in Sylhet ' the inhabitants of these mountains had embraced Islam at his hands<Shah Jalal's>, and for this reason he stayed amongst them.[78] Batuta does not clearly refers here to the peasant population of Sylhet hill tracts. It is quite possible that these hill people practised shifting population, for Batuta seems to have distinguished hill people from the cultivators of the plains who probably practised wet-rice cultivation, whom he identified as idolaters. In the early 15th century the other foreigner who noticed the Muslims in Bengal was the Chinese envoy Ma Huan <1433>.He observed a dense and prosperous population on his way from Chatgaon to Pandua via Sonargaon. In Pandua, the capital of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah<1418 - 1433>, he noticed that 'the king's palace and the large and small palaces of the nobles and temples are all in the city. And they are Musalmans'.[79] But another Chinese merchant, Wangta Yuan<1349> showed a keener perception than that of Ma Huan about the local society when he noticed that the agrarian frontier had pushed far into the Delta's hinterland transforming formerly forested areas into wet-rice cultivation fields[80] : These people<the Bengalis> owe all their tranquility and prosperity to themselves, for, its source lies in their devotion to agriculture, whereby a land originally covered with jungle has been reclaimed by their unremitting toil in tilling and planting.[79] Although this observation does not throw any light in particular on the religion of the cultivators, it does indicate the expansion of the agrarian frontier in the Delta and point towards the skill and perseverance of the peasant community.

Early in the 16th century Europeon accounts do mention about Muslims, but only as an urban class. Visiting Gaur between 1503 - 1508 Verthema noticed that the Sultan's <Alauddin Hussain Shah's> entire army, two hundred thousand men, were Muslim.[81] Tome Pires, reporting by indirect sources between 1512 and 1515, observes that 'the Kings of this kingdom turned Mohammedan three hundred years ago'[82] ; but his report lacks the comment on the religion of the

people at large.Duarte Barbosa, a contemporary of Pires, also based on accounts of travellers and not on direct observation, makes an important comment that 'the Heathens of these parts daily become Moors to gain favour of their rulers'.[83] It is possible that this remark was made in reference to Gaur, which points to Islamization of not the peasantry, but of Hindu artisans and craftsmen who belonged to the urban proletariat.

It is from the late 16th century, particularly after the Mughal conquest <1574>, the evidence of the presence of Muslim peasant population is available in foreign accounts. Caesar Fredrici<1567> noted that the entire population of Sandwip was Muslim and he was struck by the agricultural prosperity of the place.[84] In 1599 Jesuit missionary Francis Fernandez was evaluating the prospect of conversion to Christianity when he observed that the people in Narayanganj area 'are nearly all Mahometans'.[85] From the middle of the 16th century onwards Islam gradually became the dominant religion in the rural areas of Bengal. It is also significant that the Muslim peasantry became largely concentrated in the eastern half of the Delta, and not in the western part of it.[86]

But all these observations and remarks, do not lead us to the clue as to how this large rural population turned to Islam and from when. The two inter-related themes - agrarian growth and Islamization - were the effects of various forces including a longdrawn process of acculturation achieved between the 13th and the 16th centuries. Peasant community in northern and eastern parts of the Delta did never belong to the mainstream 'sanatan dharma' and were long outside the pale of sanskritization. In Brihaddharma Purana Pulinda, Khas, Pukkas, Sumha, Kamboj and Yavana have been included in the 'mlechha' group. We know from other sources that some of the tribes, Koch, Mech, Tharu, etc., took early conversion to Islam. Local Buddhists in eastern part of the Delta were also converted. Western part of Bengal maintained orthodox society in a more effective way. The sufis were mainly responsible for taking Islam into the interior of the Delta. Among all the Islamic institutions, khanqahs played the most vital role in the spread of the religion in the rural areas. These khanqahs were mostly founded on the previous Hindu/Bouddha

religious establishments which offered a continuation of the places of worship to the newly converted rural groups. Their faith and belief were naturally more similar to their non-Muslim brethren. Through acculturation and interaction emerged folk Islam in Bengal's special social context . The result was the birth of fresh symbols of worship - ghorapir, manikpir, panchpir, satyapir, etc,. This folk character of rural Islam sustained upto the 19th century when Wahabi and Faraizi leaders made efforts to purify Islam from local customs.

In Brihaddharmapurana an antyaja group has been termed as 'yavana'. From the 10th century onwards foreigners were called yavanas and Muslims were termed both as 'yavana' and 'Turushka'. In Kanaibarshi inscription <1206 AD> the coming of the Turushka has been declared. In the three inscriptions of Visvarupsen and Kesavsen there are mentions about 'gargayavana'. From the 14th century onwards in Sanskrit, Maithili and Bengali sources there are frequent mentions of Turushka , Turuk and yavana. Those who were converted from the lower order of the local society were never integrated in the foreign Muslim community. They were considered to be an antyaja caste as 'yavana' in the Hindu society. In Brahmavaivarta Purana 'jola'<julaha> Muslim weaver group has been listed and considered as antyaja. On the other hand, Islam in rural Bengal absorbed so much local culture and became so profoundly identified with a long time process of agrarian expansion that in the formative years of the emergence of Muslim society, the cultivators did not regard it as a foreign faith. Islam in Bengal went through a long process of such indegenisation that it became locally understood as 'the religion of the plough.' The continuity and sustenance of an old agrarian society simultaneously grew with the introduction of a new faith and integrated itself into the agrarian culture of the Delta . One can not but to notice the overwhelming rural nature of Islam in Bengal which not only had integrative force but also was highly syncretic in nature.

# 7

# Technology, Trade And Monetary System

In Bengal significant changes were reflected in the economy due to the process of Islamization of the polity introduced by Turkish occupation in the Delta. A qualitative change in the surplus from largely agriculture dependent economy of the pre-13th century period to the inclusion of large scale international trade surplus in the 14th and 15th centuries, is evident from several factors like increase in the volume of external trade, a stable and continuous metallic currency, growth in craft production and progress in urbanization. With the development of a centralized polity, the state became the principal appropriator of the surplus generated both by agriculture and by trade. Revival of international trade and urbanization did not start immediately with Turkish occupation of Bengal. Throughout the 13th century Turkish rulers of Bengal issued coins from Lakhnauti mint ; but its explicit purpose of use was more political than economic – assertion of independence and legitimization of succession. Trade revival of Bengal was closely related to the role of Arab merchants in south-east Asian commerce. Between the 12th and the 13th centuries Muslim traders and merchants of different nationalities including the Arabs, colonized in China, Java and Sumatra. By the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century Chinese traders reached a high point of

activity on the Coromondal and Malabar coasts. Mongol domination, esstablished in China<1206 – 1368> hampered the trading activities of Arab merchants in South-east Asian countries ; at this time the Muslim colonies in China, Java and Sumatra were dominated by Chinese traders. There is no evidence of Chinese traders coming to Bengal during this period. On the other hand, decline of the Abbasids and specially the fall of Baghdad in 1258, led to a changed trade situation to which the Arab merchants were trying to accommodate themselves. In the 13th – 14th century period, the trade-route through Alexandria-Aden-Cambay was gaining viability due to political and economic reasons. From the 15th century when Malacca in the east and Calicut and Cambay in the west turned into big markets, merchants from Gujarat, Coromondal and Bengal became capable of taking significant part in international trade of this region. Change in the direction of the trade route, increasing demand in Europe for spices from South-east Asian countries enhanced the possibility of craft production in the coastal areas, and the viable role played by Arab and Chinese merchants transformed the situation that led to the revival of trade in Bengal. Accelerated pace in urbanization, metallic currency of high value and enhanced craft production were the direct outcome of this process. Added to it were the continuities from the pre – Turkish period in the tradition of trade and currency in certain regions of Bengal.

Due to Turkish conquest Bengal had contact with the mainstream of political and economic trends in northern India. From the initial period of Turkish occupation, trade and commercial activities were promoted by conscious royal policy through conquests, minting of coins, encouragement to overseas trade, patronization of merchants and traders and promoting urban production centres. Some of the early Turkish rulers felt of the necessity of building roads for communication links. Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji <1211-1226> built long embankments invulnerable to floods to protect roads and surrounding areas. He is also accredited with having laid the foundation of a large-scale flotilla to foster internal communication system and riverine trade.[1] Later Mughisuddin Tughril <1278-1283>, Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah <1338-1339> and Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah <1342-1358> made elaborate improvements on these communication facilities.[2] Ghyasuddin I'waz

built a long road connecting Lakhnauti with Devkote in the north and Lakhnaur in the south, which served the multiple purpose of troop movement, general communication and trade route.[3] Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah, built a road, called Fakhruddiner Path,till recent times existed from Chandpur to Chatgaon,[4] parallel to Demra-Kumilla-Chatgaon road. Alauddin Hussain Shah <1493-1519> had a fine road built through the country between the Tanggon and the Purnanabha which extended to Ghoraghat. A royal road/Shahi sarq, on the eastern side of Birbhum, was also attributed to Alauddin Hussain Shah. He built a bridge to connect Tribeni and Saptagram facilitating a link between the twin-towns.[5a]

Trade and commercial activities presupposed a certain extent of centralized control over agencies of communication and transportation. The network of land routes intersecting towns, qasbahs and villages, navigable routes connecting places situated on riverbanks and terminal points on sea-coasts acted in favour of trading and commercial activities, both internal and external. Thus in Bengal, the communication routes generally played a positive role in the growth of urban centers. An all - round growth was percept in production, commerce, transport system, and safety of roads and highways under the Khalji Sultans of Delhi, and this policy might have influenced the ideas of early Turkish rulers of Bengal.

Although growth of communication and transportation system was felt to be so vital for economic progress, little technological change had taken place regarding this. Bullock carts for transporting foodgrains and other commodities from one place to the other was not commonly used; it was more costly and time-consuming for covering long distances. Transportation by water was more economic, but intra-urban transport was largely dependent on roads. The 'banjaras'/mobile foodgrain sellers kept with them large stock of bullocks, pack of horses and carts which they used for transporting agricultural and other produces from one part of the country to the other on an extensive scale. From the very inception of Turkish rule, Bengal rulers adopted a policy of using high breed horses to facilitate speedy and better communication and transportation. On the eve of his invasion Bakhtiyar Khalji and his followers were taken as horse-dealers by the people of Nadia.[6] It is possible that trading in horse

by the Turkish people had already been a common practice in those days. Karpattan, controlled by its rulers, was an emporium (for horses). Horses were sent by the Bengal governors with other valuable tributes, to the Delhi Sultans. From Ghoraghat large number of horses were sold everyday, which were taken to Lakhnauti and the authorities collected a sort of duty/'ghora mulya' on them. Bengal Sultans made gift of horses to honour scholars and poets in their court.[8] That postal communication was becoming a requisite from the early years of the 15th century could be noted from Ma Huan's observation on the postal system, possibly horse-carried, and also the use of government seals.[9] All these indicate to the use of horses as a high priority with the rulers and also their easy availability in the Delta.

Another factor, despite the grave concern of Zia Barani, was the rise of money-lending class in the society. An elementary banking system, indispensable for urban mercantile economy, was growing among the 'mahajan' groups, the tradition coming down from the 'shresthis' of the pre-13th century period.[10] 'Hundi' and 'batta' were introduced by money-lenders and their agents.[11] Transaction in horse, slaves, indigo, sugar, precious stones, spices and large amount of staple goods like cotton, timber, etc., were dealt with and carried by such modes of transport which were controlled by private owners.

During the period under review, the Turkish ruling class was favorable to trade and traders and the general atmosphere was conducive to commercial activities. The Sultans sent ships loaded with commodities to be exported to foreign countries. Ma Huan noticed that 'wealthy individuals who build ships and go to foreign countries are quite numerous'.[12] Dr. M.R. Tarafdar concludes by stating that 'monarchs and merchants were attached together by an inseparable bond of self-interest served through foreign trade'. Later Pires reported that in the mid-15th century the rulers of Aden, Hormuz, Cambay and Bengal sent gifts and presents to the Sultan of Malacca and encouraged the traders of respective countries to set up trading centres there.[13] Thus one could visualize a changed economic situation where commercialization and monetary system, backed up by trade and agricultural surplus, were gradually taking roots in Bengal.

Effective commercialization of economy is usually preceded by

improvement in technical skill to proliferate craft- manufacturing and large-scale concentration of artisans and craftsmen in urban centers. In the Sultanate period of Indian history, due to disappearance of 'visti' or forced labor, peasants could flee to cities and work there as artisans and craftsmen. Large number of Hindu artisans were found in towns under the Turkish Sultans, specially in building industry, as stone-carvers, masons,carpenters<sutradharas>,woodcrafters<darukarmakaras>, and architects<sthapatis>. It was mainly in the textile industries and royal 'karkhanas' that the converted Muslim artisans were engaged. In the time of Firuz Shah Tughloq, a weaver used to get 30 jital for making a fine cloth.[14] Muslim artisans formed a large part of Bengal's urban proletariat. Their organizations into separate groups with distinctive occupations paralleled the caste structure of the contemporary Hindu society. Poet Mukundaram mentions fifteen Muslim 'jatis' in the late 16th century.[14a] They were the earliest known class of Bengali Muslims recorded in the sources. At least five from Mukundaram's list of fifteen, - jola/the weavers, sanakar/the loom-makers, darji/the tailors, benata/ the weavers of thick cord and rangrej/the dyers-all were linked to the textile industry. It is more likely that they were initially from amongst the Hindu artisans engaged in the above mentioned occupations, or from amongst former agriculturists or unskilled laborers responding to increasing labor demand by an expanding economy. The demand of the administration brought into importance some groups of Muslim artisans like tirakar/the bow-makers and kagazi/the papermakers for making arms and producing papers for packaging and copying books. These, along with a long list of Hindu jatis formed the main task-force of urban artisan groups.

Converted Muslim population was created out of enslavement of a large number of local people on the way to conquest and occupation. Slavery was weakened by the second half of the 14th century for two main reasons : (i) the process of enslavement lay in conquest and expansion of territories which had already been exhausted as the most vital aspect of state policy; in the next phase the conquerors concentrated more on pacification of occupied areas to protect fruits of conquest. In the early 14th century slaves were treated as moveable possessions of their masters who had the right to give them bondage as security for

debt. (ii) Firuz Shah Tughlaq changed the policy of collecting slaves through plunder and conquest to obtaining them through gifts and presentations. He also introduced the system of giving them fixed salaries, treated them as workers paid for their labor. Thus slaves, obtained through conquests, raids, plunder, gifts and presents <khidmati> were employed in industrial activities.[15] Slave trade had markets all over the Islamic world, carried on into India by foreign and Indian traders and merchants. But generally slaves acquired through trade were very costly if they had potentials to be utilized for better purpose. There were slave markets all over India, main centres being at Bulandshahr, Mandor, the Doab, Sind, Gujrat, Bidar, Devgiri, Delhi, Lahore and Bengal.[16]

With an accelerated urban pace city-life was dominated by slave labor which led to a phenomenal increase in number of slaves and its consequential impact on society as a whole. Sources of slaves were more than one : (i) prisoners of war, later trained in various professional skills; (ii) people pushed out of rural habitation by lack of sufficient means of subsistence; (iii) people displaced by natural disasters like famine, flood, drought, etc., the kind of social system K.M.Ashraf calls 'unhealthy and unprogressive'. Big merchants were interested to invest in lucrative slave trade. It is to be noted here that in case of Bengal there are frequent references in the sources to domestic slavery. From Ibn Batuta and other sources it is evident that slavery was an integral part of urban life in the 14th century. In general, slave system continued with vigour upto the 15th century. Barani gives description of a big slave market in Delhi and mentions about the relative cheapness of the price of slaves.[17] In the 14th century success of military campaign was judged by the number of captives obtained for enslavement. A trained slave could be purchased at a price lower than that of a most inferior horse and about the same as that of a milch buffalo. Travelling in Bengal <1346> Ibn Batuta bought slaves at a very low price, in his own words: 'a beautiful young girl, fit to serve as a concubine, was sold in my presence for a gold dinar.... I bought nearly at the same price, a young slave woman named Ashura who was endowed with exquisite beauty. One of my comrades bought a pretty little slave called Lulu/pearl, for two gold dinars'.[18] In vernacular literature there are evidences of large number of slaves being employed

for domestic labor.

Slaves turned artisans were absorbed in productive system, but partially. In royal 'karkhanas' they were employed, but for producing very specific commodities for the consumption of royalty and aristrocracy.[19] They were also sometimes employed by mystics and non-commercial masters, particularly for weaving to produce day to day requirements. These informations do not lead to a conclusion that they were used for the purpose of large scale production for general consumption. But there is enough proof that there was substancial growth of the artisan class in the Sultanate period. From the 15th century, Hindu masons and craftsmen, the slave labour along with free labour added substancially to the growth of urban economic activity. There were two different sources for concentration of these workers in cities : (i) immigrant artisans, fewer in number, and (ii) free Hindu artisans converted to Islam, in larger number; both became city-based. Convert Muslim artisans enjoyed monopoly in textile, paper and leather industries; weaving and spinning offered occupation to a very large number of people.[20] To the age-old devices, such as roller and board method of ginning 'charkhi', carding bow, spindle and loom were added spinning wheel, crank handle, reeling wheel with crank handle and tradles in loom, all these were devices used during this period. Demand of the royalty, aristrocracy and trading communities for textile and garments, and also an urge for building construction on a large scale in the cities created employment for both Muslims and Hindu labour force, artisans and craftsmen. Generally weavers were Muslim and masons were Hindu. Technological changes differed in intensity and variety from region to region dependent on availability of raw material and local demand. The demand for crafts originated from trade, acceleration of urban commercial activities, and development of markets for distribution of finished products – all followed in due course. Increase in demand for handicrafts and luxury items by urban population gave greater thrust to trade and commerce, the most vital aspects of urban economy. Convert Muslim population generated large number of artisans consisting of working people engaged in various professions.[21] It signified the growth of a market system which again generated ample scope for craft production. Emergence of Indian Muslims, whom Prof. Muhammad

Habib regarded as 'the intermediate link' between foreign immigrants and local Hindus, was the instant effect of the changing system and the new process.[22]

Textile production, metal work, shipbuilding, masonry all required large labour force. Patronage to architecture was an usual method of public display to enhance the prestige and superiority of the royalty and the ruling class. During this period masonry, brick manufacture and terracotta decorative art became very popular, and along with these stone cutters, curvers, masons, carpenters and blacksmiths had a heavy demand. For colonized ruling class of Bengal regular supply of Central Asian or Middle Eastern craftsmen, even through North India, was not available in large number to be employed in construction work. This was one of the major reasons for the employment of slave cum artisans in building activities in the Sultanate period. With the consolidation of Turkish power in the Delta the source of slaves drawn from captives as drying up because fewer battles were fought. Also, slaves used to buy freedom from their masters after acquiring skill for craftsmanship and became free artisans. Caste-artisans, on the other hand, gradually adjusted themselves to some new skill and technique imported by the ruling class.[23]

Since their arrival in the early 13th century foreign influence on the ruling class was gradually yielding place to a syncretic local culture and different forms of indegenization. It was explicit in architectural style where native motifs and structural straits being adopted in buildings became quite obvious from the 15th century. Eklakhi mausoleum has been taken by scholars as prototype of Bengali mosques in the early 15th century.[24] In pre-Turkish period of Bengal architecture use of vault was exceptional and possibly experimental. In the Turkish period when this became a standard practice, local architects were trained in the skill. It is also possible that they came from older Hindu-Buddhist artisan families. Both temples and mosques drew freely on local architectural traditions, so that despite their widely differing functions, temple and mosque achieved a certain affinity of design. This syncretic cultural phenomenon also indicates the social growth of an artisan class with Hindu-Muslim in artistic continuity.[25] Hindu artisans by their technical skill and traditional experience, were much sought after the Turkish

ruling class. The story of the construction of Firuza Minar in Gaur proves that by the end of the 15th century there was ample supply of highly skilled local masons and artisans near the capital city. When the minar was being constructed, Abyssinian Sultan Saifuddin Firuz Shah <1486-1489>, it is alleged, ordered to put his chief mason to death because of the latter's boastfulness about the excellence of his performance. To finish the incomplete minar the Sultan sent his people in search of competent masons; mainly skilled masons lived in nearby Moragaon who were immediately brought to Gaur to complete the work.[26] Bengal Sultans were vigorous builders; it was during the independent Sultanate period that the form of housing from wood-thatch was converted to brick structure in towns and cities. It is also to be noted that the traditional Bengal design of 'aatchala'-'chouchala' was adopted by the rulers in mosques. Terracotta relief decorations became very popular during this period. Adina mosque in Hazrat Pandua, built at the end of the 14th century, points towards Bengal's trade relations with West Asia and Persian Gulf area.Its model was taken from Iran or West Asia. But in the interior of the mosque the traditional terracotta relief decoration and local motifs were used in profusion. When the demand was generated to decorate building by these traditional designs in Gaur, Pandua, Bagerhat, Muazzamabad and such other urban centres, the social mobility of the artisans and craftsmen must have had increased to a great extent .

From the Chinese source it is known that rich people used to reside in mansions and palatial buildings made of bricks and internally decorated in floral designs and animal motifs. These houses had flat roofs and flight of steps resting on a number of pillars. This type of source also notes that 'bamboo houses' were specially constructed by the rich, 'so constructed that the cost of a single one will be five thousand rupees or more and they last a long time'.[27] It is possible that residential houses in brick were built after the 'charchala' model of bamboo houses.

Glazed tiles, both coloured and white, were used on the walls for decorative purpose.[27a] Decorative techniques other than glazed tiles included mosaic, plaster, carving and of course, terracotta motifs, panels and freezes. Gumti-gate in Gaur shows the influence of north Indian architectural technique. It is possible that during the Lodi-Sharqi conflict when Hussain Shah Sharqi , Sultan of Jaunpur, migrated to Bengal he

might have brought with him Jaunpuri masons and designers who supervised and participated in the construction work. That brick and stone used as building materials, revived masonary and 'stone-cutters' art evident in the Golden mosque, Chhotosona mosque of Gaur, which represented the best type of stonecutting and masonary technique in Bengal.[28] Bengal style may be compared to another contemporary regional Sultanate, that of Gujrat monuments in architectural features of the 15th century mosques of Ahmadabad and Junagarh. Use of epigraphic slabs, calligraphy and stone pillars were quite common in pre-Hussain Shahi period; but during the Hussain Shahi rule there was a distinct pre-dominance of stonecutters art and technique. As has been already noted, ancient and traditional terracotta art form of Bengal was used in profusion in both mosques and temples; the artisans must have acquired technique for collecting special clay and burning it properly to sustain the onslaught of time. Rich ornamentation of Hussain Shahi style clearly stands out in strong contrast with the austere style of the previous period. It is a clear manifestation of the opulence of the urban lifestyle of the time.[29]

Metal industry must have flourished in some parts of the Delta. Abul Fazl mentions about iron mines in the sarkar of Bazuha.[30] It can not be over-looked that blacksmiths and goldsmiths constituted distinct social groups by themselves with better social status in the rural-urban class. Peasants and cultivators constantly required services of blacksmiths for agricultural implements and other tools of daily use. Implements made of iron were needed both for ship-building and boatbuilding. Ma Huan noticed steel guns, knives and scissors being sold in the open market of Pandua.[31] Blacksmiths melted iron-ore to make things of common use like razors, locks and keys, as well as guns, and blades for swords for the army. Other alloy used to make domestic utensils and decoration purpose was brass. Absence or extreme paucity of copper coins, only a single one has been discovered in the reign of Ruknuddin Barbak Shah<1458-1474>, and also the lack of general information about the metal, may be taken as its not being used significantly, atleast in metallic currency. Foreign accounts and Bengali literature offer description of urban women decked with gold ornaments. According to Firishta, the rich class in Bengal used gold vessels, and displaying them to others in

feasts and banquets was considered to be a social prestige.[32] According to Sing Yang Ch'ao Kung Tein Lu<1520> ... 'Bengal is rich and civilized. To our ambassador they presented gold basins, gold girdles and gold bowls and to our vice-ambassador the same articles in silver. To our officials of the foreign affairs, they presented gold bells and long gowns of white hemp and silk. Our soldiers got silver coins.' If they had not been rich how could they do it in such an extravagant way.[32a] Extensive number of mints and wide circulation of coins indicate an efficient technique of processing silver. All these informations may be taken as examples of a technology for cultivation of metallurgy in some form or other.

The process of manufacturing of sugar was widely known in Bengal. Prepared from local variety of sugar-cane it was extremely white and of good quality. But the producers did not know how to crystallize it, so they packed it in powder-form in parcels of untanned leather. Sugar was exported from Bengal to different parts of India, including to Malabar and Cambay, where it could fetch very high price.[33] Although consumed locally, Bengal was well-known for its jaggery <gur – according to some the word 'Gaur' has been derived from it> from dates, palm and sugar-cane juice. Sugar and jaggery were produced in such a scale that it could be taken as a stable cottage industry.[34] Paper was introduced from Central Asia to Northern India by the Persianized Turks in the 13th century. By the 15th century the technology of paper production found its way into Bengal, where it eventually replaced the art of writing on palm-leaves. It is also possible that the art of paper-making was imported from China. In the early 15th century, the Chinese envoy Ma Huan observed that 'paper is as white and smooth and glossy as deer skin.' Paper was available in the markets of the capital city of Pandua; this was made from the bark of special type of tree.[35] Writing books and packaging were the two major purposes for which paper was widely used. Prof. Eaton points out that 'it is also significant that on Bengal's expanding agrarian frontier, the introduction of paper-making technology coincided with the rise of a Muslim religious gentry whose authority structure was based on the body of books'.[35a] In the list of names of artisans, given by Mukundaram, 'kagazi' is a special group.

Ship and boat building in Bengal had a long tradition in Bengal.

From the 14th century, this activity was specially revitalized by the demand generated by the accelerated pace of trade and commerce. Boats as means of transportation, as well as trading, was used long before Turkish rule.[36] During the Turkish rule the technique of ship-building improved in various ways. In the early period of Turkish occupation the governors used to maintain flotilla for army supply in the time of war. Ma Huan noticed that big merchants owned ships to carry on trade with other parts of the world.[36a] From Masalik al Absar it is known, some ships built in Bengala were so large that these consisted of bazar and karkhana overboard. These were so spacious that it took quite some time for the passengers to come to know each other. The speed-boats made in Bengal were also highly praised.[37] This has been corroborated by Verthema when he says that in Bengal various types of ships and boats were built; he specially mentions a cargo ship called 'giunci' which could carry thousand piper of load.[38] Barbosa, too observed the prevalence of boat and ship-building in Bengal.[39] International trading communities and Indian merchants in the city of Bengala owned big ships which they called 'jungos' or 'junks'. In Bengali literature<Mangal Kavyas> there are frequent mentions of 'saptadinga'(a flotilla of seven) for trading and names of luxury boats like 'mayurpankhi'. Dhanapati sadagar and his son Srimanta used hundred yards long and twenty yards wide boats for their trading activities.[40] Poet Jagajjivan gives a graphic description of how Kusai sadagar ordered skilled builders to make fourteen ships at a time.[41]

Although textile was already the most prominent among locally manufactured goods in the pre-13th century Bengal, the volume and variety of textiles produced and exported increased in the post-Turkish conquest period. In the early days Amir Khusrau was highly appreciative of the excellent quality of Bengal textile.[42] In the late 13th century Marco Polo noted the commercial importance of Bengal cotton.[42a] In 1345 Ibn Batuta greatly admired Bengal's superfine muslin materials.[43] Between 1415 to 1432 the Chinese diplomats drew attention to Bengal's production of muslin, veils of various colours, turban materials, handkerchiefs, embroidered silk and brocaded taffetas and rugs.[44] Ludovico di Verthema <in Gaur between 1503-1508> noticed that fifty ships laden every year in this place cotton and silk stuff went to Turkey, Syria, Persia, Arabia Felix and other parts of India. A few years later

Tome Pires(1512-1515), collected information from indirect sources and described the export of Bengal textile to ports of the eastern part of the Indian Ocean.[45] Foreign travellers have given valuable informations about the high quality and many varieties of textile manufactured in Bengal. They noted that different qualities and varieties were used for different purposes.

Thus Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta, Chinese diplomats and Portuguese and Indian travellers, all were beholden to the beauty and quality of the textile manufactured in Bengal. In a later period Abul Fazl specifies some of the areas where textile manufacture was concentrated when he says that Sarkar Barbakabad produced a fine cloth named 'gangajal'. The Sarkar of Sonargaon also produced 'a species of muslin, very fine and in great quantity'.[46] From Abul Fazl's observation we may try to determine the geographical distribution of weaving centres which depended on right type of soil for cultivation of cotton, availability of raw material, specially dye and proximity of consumption and distribution centres like ports and towns. He also mentions that a kind of coarse sack cloth<khuian> was produced in large quantity in the Sarkar of Ghoraghat.[46a] Tome Pires was the contemporary of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah. He says that some valuable articles available in Bengal were produced in the neighbouring countries like Orissa, Tripura and Kamrup- Kamta. The rulers acknowledged the superiority of Bengal Sultan because he gave them outlet to export commodities. A kind of coarse fabric was also manufactured from jute<pattabastra> the reference of which is available in Bengali literature. This material seems to be meant for the use of ordinary people. The 14th and 15th centuries witnessed the introduction of sericulture, breeding of mulberry worm for producing silk. Although 'tassar', 'eri' and 'muga' used to be produced in Bengal from ancient times, but sericulture proper reached from China. Ma Huan refers to culture of silk-worms and availability of fine silk. He points out to 'mulberry trees, silk worms and cocoons, all these they have'.[47] The Chinese themselves were exporters of excellent quality silk, satin and porcelain in the Delta. Silk production made considerable progress in the 16th century. Verthema mentions that silk was one of the principal export items of Bengal. From Abul Fazl it seems that the Sarkar of Ghoraghat was reputed for its silk production. From the above mentioned

informations it is fairly certain that Bengal acquired prominence as a great centre of textile manufacturing.[48] Textile of different quality and variety was produced in large quantity in different parts of the region and local weavers were competent enough to manufacture high quality finished goods. Both Barbosa and Vethema point out that clothes were spun in wheels and woven by men. But how the commodities were collected from production centres, who were the intermediaries, what was the relationship between the artisans, local traders and foreign merchants - the sources are insufficient to answer all these questions. Some informations are available about local markets, small transactions and local consumption, but too limited in scope to discuss in detail.

A marked change in Bengal due to Islamization of polity and economy is reflected in the sphere of trade and commerce. The surplus created by a favourable trade balance, added to it regular appropriation of agricultural surplus, brought about a qualitative change in the economy. It has already been noted how the land system was transformed with Turkish occupation, and how different social groups associated with and or dependent on land, used and appropriated agricultural surplus for urban consumption. A major shift in trade balance in favour of Bengal is noticed in the 15th century by its inclusion into international trade routes. Overseas trade was revitalized, and to a basically rich agricultural economy was added a considerable trade surplus.

Spread of Islam along the sea-routes of Asia had a direct relation to the restoration of Bengal's overseas trade contact from the 14th century. Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries the process of Islamization went on along the sea-routes of South-east Asia.[49] Islamization being a causative factor in overseas trade, revitalization of commercial activities was a general phenomenon in South-east Asia during this period, and as a part of this region Bengal was again linked up with the major east-west sea-route passing through Indonesia.[50] Two principal sea-routes in the period under review were: (i) south-eastern direction to Burma, Arakan, Pegu, Ava, Siam, Malacca, Sumatra, Java, the Spice Islands, Celebes, Borneo, Champa, extending upto China; (ii) South-western direction to Orissa, Coromondal and Malabar coasts, reaching Arabia, Abyssinia, etc., via Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. As Islamization of sea-routes in South-east Asia went on North Sumatra accepted Islam

in the last decade of the 13th century, Cambay embraced the new faith in 1304, by the end of the 14th century Islam won over almost all the remaining regions in Sumatra. Tome Pires, Accountant in the Portuguese factory in Malacca, wrote Suma Oriental between 1512-1515; he reported from the direct experience he had in commerce and trade in South-east Asia in the larger context of socio-economic life in that region. The Portuguese conquered Malacca, an important port in the Malayan Archaepilago, in control of South-east Asian including Indian and Europeon trade. He has given a realistic account of Malacca's trade relation with other Asian countries- main trend of Asian trade, general characteristics of South-east Asian monarchies including Bengal, role of port-towns in overseas trade, link between the sea-routes and coastal regions- almost nothing escaped his observation. Tome Pires claims that the first Muslim monarchy in Pasai in North Sumatra was founded by the Bengalis somewhere around the middle of the 14th century. Dr Arun Dasgupta says, 'evidently Arab merchants, Gujrati preachers and South-Indian Muslims, all played their part in the total process of conversion of the region to Islam'.[51]

Behind all these new trends there was a long history of maritime contact between the Delta and the Middle East seen through the eyes of Arab geographers and travellers, like Suleiman Tajir<d.851>, Ibn Khurdadbih<d.850>, al Masudi <d.956>, al Idrisi <d.1150>, all of whom were familiar with Bengal.[52] Masudi mentions Muslims as long distance maritime merchants living there in the 10th century. Tradition of Chandra coinage (825-1035), discovery of Abbasid coins in the Lalmai region point towards this region, its integration with the world around Indian Ocean dominated by Arab traders.[53a] But Prof. R.M.Eaton mentions about a recent study on the global distribution of four legal schools of Sunni Islam which suggests that Islam did not spread by the way of the high seas. In the Islamic world converted population tended to accept the school of law brought over by the Muslim preachers and other carriers of the faith. India's Malabar coast underwent Islamisation by Shafi'i Arabs. Had Bengal been Islamised by the seafaring Shafi'i Arabs, one might expect that the coastal Muslim population of the Delta to follow Shafi'i School of Law. But by the 1500 Bengal Muslims turned out to be mainly followers of Hanafi school, a dominant legal tradition among

inland Muslims living further up the Gangetic plain and throughout Central Asia, pointing towards north-western overland origin of Bengal's Islamisation.[54] Both Dr Abdul Karim and Dr Enamul Haq are of opinion that Bengal's trade contact with Arab merchants happened on the Bay of Bengal coast.[54a] However plausible this argument is, it does not rule out the possibility of trade-routes being originally Islamized from waterfront.

From the 14th century onwards Bengal was included in the international trade-route from Alexandria-Kush-Aden-Cambay-Malabar-Coromondol to Malacca. For her revival of trade contact, increase in demand for spices from Southeast Asian countries in European market which created the necessity for production and manufacture of exportable items in the coastal areas were mainly responsible. During this time maritime trade in the west coast and mercantile ships were in control of Arab and Gujrati merchants. Gujrati traders were so dominant that, according to Tome Pires, the Malaccan administration appointed a special officer-in-charge<Shah-i-bandar> to deal with them. Export trade was in the hands of two regional Sultanates-Bengal and Gujrat.[55] 'Bengala' and Cambay, the two renowned ports of the time, supplied among other things, silk and cotton textiles to Persia, Turkey, Syria, the Barbary, Ethiopia, Arabia Felix, and to other places in India.[55a] Extension of Bengal trade with the far east is clearly evident in the Chinese sources of the early 15th century; it is possible to have a comprehensive idea of Chinese participation in the trade of South-east Asia and the coastal regions of India. It appears from this source that there was a direct sea-route connecting Sumatra to Chatgaon, and from there one could travel by river-ways to Sonargaon and finally reach the twin capital cities of Gaur - Pandua. China's involvement in South-east Asian trade was largely due to the initiative taken by the enterprising South China Muslims.[56]

Foreign traders and travellers, who knew Bengal during this period, referred in high terms the glory of maritime commerce enjoyed by the Sultanate. Both Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta noticed progress in trade and consequent commercial prosperity of Bengal.[57] Early in the 15th century, a Chinese record that the merchants in Pandua were engaged in business 'the value of which may be ten thousand pieces of gold'

Ma Huan remarked that 'the rich build ships, in which they carry on commerce with foreign nations .....many here are engaged in trade'.[58] Around 1518 Duarte Barbosa described wealthy Arabs, Iranians, Abyssinians and 'Indians' of Bengala, the largeness, wealth and climate of which attracted many foreign traders and merchants. They owned big ships 'after the fashion of Mokah <Mecca>' by which they carried on trade with different parts of the world. Numerous products of Bengal were carried to Charamandel, Malacca, Camatra, Peegu, Cambaya, and Ceilam'.[59] Verthema refers to 'the richest merchants' who belonged to the city of Banghella from where cotton and silk-stuffs were sent 'through all Turkey, through Syria, through Persia, through Arabia Felix, through Ethiopia, and through all India'.[60] Surprised by the immense volume of trade which passed through and from Bengal Joao de Barros commented, 'the king of Bengala alone held as much as he <Bahadur Shah of Gujrat> and the king Narasinga <of the Vijaynagar Empire> jointly had'.[61]

Major export items from Bengal included rice, wheat, cotton textile, silk fabric and sugar. At that time cotton production in other South-east Asian countries which was not sufficient to meet the demand; so, for supply of cotton textile the traders depended on India, Bengal calico fetched incredibly high price from both Indians and foreign markets, 'cloth which sell on the spot for 22s. and 6p., fetch 90s. in Calicut', said Vasco da gama.[62] From his statement it may well be derived that the ratio between price of cloth in Calicut and Bengal was 4:1 approximately. Almost similar view has been expressed by Barbosa that a quintal of sugar would sell for 1300 reisin in Malabar, and big profit could be made by selling different varieties of textiles.[63] Of the imports of Bengal the Chinese in the early 15th century brought in silk, satin and porcelain. In Tome Pires there are some new and valuable informations about trade between South-east Asia and different parts of India. He says that every year four or five ships used to carry goods from this part of the country to Malacca and Pasai in Sumatra. Apart from small ships, big and heavy ships like the Chinese junks carried goods worth eighty to ninety thousand cruseds to Malacca; export items included cotton textile, sugar, rice, dried salted fish and meat, preserved vegetables, ginger, orange, figs, etc,. Import items were camphor, black pepper, cloves, nutmeg, sandalwood, pearls, etc., from Borneo, white and green earthenware,

copper, tin, lead, etc., from China, opium, white and green damask, carpet from Aden, sword and knife from Java- all through Malacca. Trade relation with Malacca was very vital for Bengal economy. Apart from this Bengal's trade relation was extended to Siam, Pegu, Burma and Arakan on the east and Ceylon, Malabar coast, Maldives, Chaul, Davol, Cambay, Persian Gulf countries, Arabian coast on the west. According to Pires this trade was highly profitable e.g., even after paying export duty in Malacca at the rate of 3¼% and import duty in Bengal at the rate of 35% - profit still remained at the rate of 200% to 300%. Buying and selling of gold, silver and cowrie was another source of profit. Compared to Malacca gold was costlier in Bengal by 1/6th and Bengal silver was dearer in Malacca by 1/4th or 1/5th Bengal currency was acceptable and in circulation there which again shows a favourable balance of trade.[64] A prominent feature of the economic life of Bengal was trading in eunuchs and slaves, alluded by foreign travellers like Marco polo, Ibn Batuta, Barbosa, etc,. Abul Fazl mentions import of salt, diamond, emerald, pearl, cornelian and agate- this list has been roughly corroborated by the poets of the Mangal-Kavyas.[65] It is to be noted here that Bengal imported luxury articles and her export trade consisted of essential items of daily use.[66]

But no such detail about internal trade is available. Although repeated mention of local markets where money-lenders, small traders, shopkeepers and common people transacted, has been depicted graphically in vernacular literature. Internal trade, compared to the extensive maritime commerce enjoyed by Bengal, remained an insignificant factor in the sources. Despite some efforts taken by a few rulers, absence of surface routes must have been a deterrent in this period. One of the main reasons behind this problem, lack of communication by overland road network, was the frequent hostility and often military encounters between Bengal and her neighbours, which definitely made travel by road running through enemy countries insecure, not to speak of using them for trading purpose. In the Vaishnav biographical literature some routes have been mentioned, such as Sri Chaitanya going to Orissa via Midnapur, travelling to Vrindaban-Mathura and to the south; also Nityananda travelled for eight long years in different parts of India, mostly taking land routes which could as well have been used for trading

purpose.[67] Numerous names of different types of boats are frequently available in the Mangal Kavyas; it points towards communication by waterways which carried internal trade and it was more applicable in case of eastern part of the Delta. Also mention of 'Kutghats' as stations where water-tax was collected indicate towards internal trade by riverine routes. In the epigraphic source there is mention of the designation of 'Mir-i-bahar' who had the duty to supervise the flotilla and collect revenue in connection with it. Tome Pires came to know that Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah was not that kind to traders and 36% state-tax was rigorously imposed on them – 'they say that ten or twelve people collect the dues, each one his own, and they are the officials for this, and that when they take their tithe they wrong the merchants and tyrannise over them openly'.[68]

Mukundaram's mention about Bengali 'baniks' and 'saudagars' going to Magadh, Mathura, Vijayanagar, Gujarat and Maratha country indicate internal trade of Bengal with these regions.[69] Barbosa compared Bengal's volume of export trade with that of Vijayanagar and Gujrat.[70] It is interesting to note here that many administrative terms, official designations and honorary titles available in epigraphic source in Bengal, are also found in pre-Mughal Gujrat.[71] When Nusrat Shah <1519-1532> was about to effect a political alliance with Bahadur Shah of Gujrat, the latter must have had a knowledge about Bengal's position in the world of maritime trade. These informations are suggestive of trade and cultural relationship between the two coastal Sultanates.[72] In the vernacular literature we find mention of a newly founded city named 'Gujrat'. The entire coast-line from Calicut to Quilon depended heavily on yearly supply of rice from Bengal and Orissa. There is mention of trade in sandalwood between Orissa and Bengal. In Jayanandas Chaitanya-mangal traders in Nabadwip were consumers of commodities coming from Varanasi, Orissa, Tibet, Kashmir, etc., possibly these commodities were carried to Nabadwip by riverways. Very few mention in contemporary literature indicate small volume of trade items, catered to the few rich, sold to individual customers. There is a single mention of 'bhot' blanket coming from the hilly regions of the east.

In the Sultanate period in north India big merchants/tujjars dealt with both export and import trades.[73] Small or petty traders transacted

in the markets on the local level; undefined conventional rules and local systems were the usual determinants of dealings. The state on the other hand tried to keep control over tujjars and dallals/brokers and middlemen who tended to flourish at the expense of both producers and suppliers. Tujjars were also in control of caravans; they moved all over India, Central Asia, Persia, Khorasan, Iraq and other parts of the Islamic world. Banjaras were mobile gram-sellers who might have had some kind of interaction with local traders and suppliers.

To assess the position of the maritime traders in commercial world of Bengal, it is important to discuss who were in control of trade, what was the status of the Bengali merchants in comparison to other Indian and foreign trading communities. Iranian, Turkish, Arab and Italian traders, and merchants from western India – from Chaul, Dabohl, Goa, etc., whose first preference was Calicut and next Bengal, lived and worked here. During this time west-coast of Indian Ocean was controlled by Gujrati and Arab merchants. Merchants of the Coromondol was equally powerful in the trading world of South-east Asia. Compared to them Bengali traders were in a weaker situation. According to Tome Pires, 'the Bengalees are great merchants brought up to trade. They are domestic. All the merchants are false.....when they<other traders> want to insult a man they call him a Bengalee. They are very treacherous; they are very sharp witted'.[74] This is a mixed reaction to Bengali traders; but it is important to note that their image was tarnished by falsity in dealings. In Malacca they were included with merchants from Pegu, Pasai, Java and Siam. Bengali Trader's Colony founded in Pasai by a Bengali in the 14th century was a distant possibility. There was no Bengali speaking elite trading community in Bengal in the 14th century who could be engaged in foreign trade.

Presence of foreign trading groups in important cities and ports of Bengal is evident in the sources. Barbosa found in the entire coastal region of Bengal overwhelming presence of Muslim traders from almost every part of the Islamic world. Verthema and Barbosa visited Bengal in the early part of the 16th century and Joao de Barros kept his records immediately after the fall of the Hussain Shahi dynasty in 1538; all three of them, with Tome Pires, have left valuable account of the economic life of the region.The presence of foreign trading communities

in the urban centres of Bengal has already been discussed.[75]

From contemporary Bengali literature we come to know about baniks and saudagars who were the dominant heroes of the Mangal kavyas. Quite a difference is understood in the literary source between the status of baniks and saudagars. Local small/petty traders are often referred as baniks in vernacular literature like shankhabanik<trader in conchshell goods>, gandhabanik/spice-trader, suvarnabanik/trader in gold items, but not jeweller. Saudagars traded on a large-scale with other parts of India, like Mathura, Vrindavan in the north, Gujrat and Maratha country in the west and Simhala in the south – both the legendary saudagars Chand and Dhanapati traded with Gujrat and Simhala. They traded in oil, butter, preserved fish, betel-leaves and jute materials. Baniks and byaparis have often been mentioned in Vaishnav literature. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Bengali baniks flourished in the port of Satgaon; they were the most active supporters of the Vaishnav movement . As has already been mentioned before that Sri Chaitanya and Nityananda travelled extensively in some parts of the subcontinent; it is a possibility that they followed the trade-routes generally used by Bengali baniks and saudagars. This was approximately the limited world of Bengali traders. Despite these references maritime trade did not remain within their reach. It is more likely that mostly the Bengali traders purchased finished products from local artisans and craftsmen/collected food stuff and sold them to Gujrati and foreign traders. The baniks of Saptagram did not have to go out of their periphery, because they could afford to enjoy wealth and material happiness sitting at home, does not seem to be a plausible justification for their lack of participation in overseas trade. Their limited sphere of activity was noticed by Tome Pires when he observed, 'they are domestic'. In a study by Prof. Ashin Dasgupta it has been pointed to the misconception which exists about the exclusion of Hindu traders from the seas in the pre-colonial period upto the 18th century; Hindu traders from Gujrat, Coromondal and Hoogly owned and captained ships and competed in the trade. This dispels the notion that 'stay at home' supine Indian merchants collapsed at the arrival of foreign competition.[76] For the limited trading activities of Bengali baniks and saudagars, one has to look into the social system of the time. It is a fact that unlike the local traders the foreign traders enjoyed the advantage of

receiving the patronage of the ruling class, being present in a close proximity of the most dominant consumer class of the society representing power-structure in the urban centers. It is also to be noted of the absence of organized guild system. Although it is more likely that in shipbuilding local Bengali craftsmen were employed in large number because of their technical skill and easy availability , but Bengali traders did not have any ownership right on ships. There is no presence of elite and powerful Bengali trading community in the local sources. In Brihaddharmapurana and Brahmavaivartapurana , banik class has been placed at the lower level of the social order. With the improvement in quality and increasing demand of Bengal textile, a technically competent weaver class emerged. Two subcastes, jola and sarak, emerged in the society who were included among the antyajas<untouchables>. All surplus or profit was controlled by middlemen and through them reached to foreign merchants.[77]

15th century to early 16th century was the 'golden age' of trade in Bengal. But finally they were overpowered by the Portuguese and the other Europeon traders. The period between 1519 to 1538 was marked by constant encounter of Bengal Sultans and the Portuguese, who relentlessly pressurized the former, in the time of grave political crisis, for gaining commercial foothold in the Bay of Bengal. Finally in 1536, a significant year in Bengal's economic history, Affonso de Mello succeeded in obtaining permission from Sultan Ghyasuddin Mahmud III to build factories in Chatgaon and Satgaon, with the right to control custom houses from there. Economic crisis precipitated by political upheavel resulting from fight between the Bengal Sultan, the Afghans, the Mughals and the Portuguese led to the disruption and decline of regional trading and commercial activities with the final fall of the independent Sultanate in 1538.

Compared to post-Turkish conquest period<13th century> Bengal might not have had a uniform and strong currency system in the pre-13th century period. But the grim picture of absence of any currency given by the early Turkish court historians has been reassessed in recent times. On the eve of their conquest of Bengal the Turkish invaders in the Delta did not come across any metallic currency of high value. Minhaj, the earliest official historian, observed about the situation in Bengal '....as in that country the kowrie<shell> is the current money in the place of

silver, the least gift he<Lakshmansena> used to bestow was a lac of kowrie'.[78] But according to recent researches it cannot be denied that natural economy in place of money economy was not the general state of affairs in Bengal. Dr N.R. Ray discussed in detail the paucity of metallic currency in the Pala period and its absence in the Sena period. He assigned the reasons for it like lack of atmosphere for trade and commerce and decline of urban centers due to it . He did not use the word 'feudalism' frequently in his thesis, but put a lot of emphasis on the concept of 'self-contained village unit' based on natural economy. On the eve of the Turkish conquest there is proof of trade being pursued in Nudia which Bakhtiyar Khalji first attacked. When he entered the town with eighteen horses, people mistook him for a horse-trader. Minhaj observed that Karampattan, a place only five 'farsang' distant from Lakhnauti, was a great horse-trading centre where about fifteen hundred horses were sold daily and sent to Lakhnauti.[79] The economy of the post-Gupta period Bengal has been lighted up by Dr S.K. Maity, who has, however, shown that Sasanka, the King of Gaur<603-619> who held sway over Bihar, Bengal and Orissa struck gold coins which contained good percentage of the metal suggesting economic prosperity of the area under his control.[80] Silver and gold coins were also issued by the kings of Orissa in 9th and 10th centuries. It is interesting to note here that the earliest coin of the Turkish muqti/wali found in Orissa, was one of Ikhtiyaruddin<Mughisuddin> Yuzbak who governed Bengal from 1246. The coin weighs 171gms of silver, minted at Lakhnauti and issued in the year 1255. The gold coins of Ramadeva, king of Orissa<1212-1271>, found at Parimalgiri, were exactly of the same type and weighed between 7.37 to 7.42gms.[81] Although gold coins of Pala period have not been found, the commercial prosperity enjoyed in the period proved that gold currency was not indispensable for overseas trade; meagre in number, yet silver coins of Pala period have been discovered. In the Sena period neither gold nor silver coins have been found out, even copper is scarce. Dr N.R. Ray thought that the mention in the landgrant document of puran/kapardakpuran indicated some kind of currency. There are other two units, churnin and karshapan, mentioned in the sources. Dr B.N. Mukherjee opines that churni/churna was nothing but silver dust as medium of equal value to 1280 kowries/kapardaks.[82] Recent

excavations in the Mainamati –Lalmai region have discovered 350 Gupta and post-Gupta period coins. Bengal was also a participant in this coinage ssystem. Some of the regional rulers issued coins in imitation of Gupta coins<arch type>. On the coins found in Mainamati excavation trident and bull legends have been often used; approximate dating of these coins is between the 8th and the 9th centuries; this type of coins were circulated by the Deva dynasty in south-east Bengal. In the 10th century when Bengal textile was being absorbed into wider Indian Ocean commercial network, two trade diasporas overlapped in the Delta region : one extending eastward from the Arabian Sea was dominated by Arab and Persian traders, and the and the other extending eastward from the Bay of Bengal controlled by Buddhist Bengalis. From the 10th to the 11th century the Chandra dynasty rulers controlled Harikel-Samatata-Banga region and issued coins similar to Arakanese coins. Some are of the opinion that the Chandra dynasty of the eastern Bengal was related to Chandra dynasty of Arakan<788-957>. Chandra dynasty became a powerful factor in this region; trident and bull legend coins have been found in Sylhet, Comilla and Rajshahi area. Prof. Barrie Morrison has shown that there was marked variation in the economic condition of Samtata with other parts of Bengal, when he says 'many of the property holding being transferred were much larger than those anywhere else. The large grants to institutions, along with continued minting of a high quality silver currency and the largest known concentration of major building sites datable in this period in the whole of the Delta suggests that rulers of Samtata were wealthier and were able to maintain a more stable political administration than other dynasties. Whatever the reason, property transfers in Samtata were different from those found elsewhere in the Delta'.[83]

Almost all the major modern scholars agree that Arab merchants had trade contact with pre-Turkish Bengal from the eastern waterfront. As has already been noted that Arab geographers, like Suleiman (app. 851 AD), Ibn Khurdabih (d.922 AD), al Idrisi (b. end of the 11th century) and a1 Masudi (d.956 AD) gave descriptions of trade routes followed by Muslim merchants.[84] They reported an area which has been considered by different scholars as Bengal. 'Ruhami' has been assessed as 'Ramu' in southern part of Chatgaon and the port 'Samandar' as Chatgaon itself. At the upper level of the third stage in the Kutila-Mura excavation site,

Abbasid silver coins have been discovered, including the one issued by the Abbasid Caliph al Mutasim Billah, which points towards trade contact between the Arab countries and Bengal.[85] Suleiman and Khurdadbih mention about fine, coarse and 'musabbar' type of textiles which were most possibly exported from Ruhami. Thus continuity of trade relation has been evidenced in different sources of pre-13th century Bengal.

Currency on the whole had a greater monetary value than the token value of the circulated coins; it was one of the most important instruments of economic change: an indicator of the growth of trade and commerce; agricultural surplus could be shifted from rural areas to urban centres through a strong currency; standardised coinage could work as the most vital medium of exchange. It had two-fold influence on medieval economy: (i) it provided a permanent and imperishable form of wealth other than land, when wealth still consisted in land. When a stable money economy led to increase in production of cash crops and various commodities, which turned into a major component of a growing economy; (ii) it fostered urban concentration by furnishing a devise of measuring with accuracy the value of articles of exchange in trade. Money circulation for lending and cash circulation was an accepted norm in urban economic life. Barter system could no more be a dominant form in economic dealings. The presence of a strong currency in the economy led to a shift in traditional relationship among people when there was a more widening gap in their economic status. Accordingly social relationship tended to become more formal; there was less element of involvement or personal feelings among the urban social groups in business and trade transactions.

In the post-13th century period regeneration of overseas trade was supported by a strong currency system. It is not only in Bengal alone, but the economy of the other contemporary regional kingdoms also rested firmly on coins as the stable medium of exchange. Metallic currency acquired greater economic significance by restoration of overseas trade and acceleration in the pace of urbanization. With a progressive transformation in the polity, an Islamic orientation towards coinage was evident. According to Islamic practices every Muslim ruler in the time of assumption of power, chose a title, struck coins/sikka and read Friday prayers/khutbah in the name of higher authority and himself. This whole

process had an important political significance – that of legitimization of a ruler to rule. In the first hundred years of Turkish rule most of the time, directly or indirectly under the hegemony of Delhi, the muqtis/walis issued coins in joint names with the Sultans of Delhi. But even in this early stage the recorded weight of Bengal coins is the evidence of the adoption of a new standard. In this early stage of the remittance of the ghanima/ treasures, captured by the military governors from plunder tribute and to the Delhi Treasury necessitated the issuing of coins regularly. A ready supply of precious metals must have come from hoards plundered from temples; often than not Hindu rais and ranas paid tribute in gold and silver. With time a regular collection of land-revenue from iqtas made it necessary for cash remittance to the urban centres for appropriation of the ruling class. Commemorative gold coins were generally issued to pass on the information of any important victory over to the locals. In Bengal remonetarization of economy started firmly and continuosly with the consolidation of political power and assumption of independence under the Sultanate when drainage of local wealth in the form of tribute to Delhi was stopped.[86]

Bengal was a part of the Delhi Sultanate from 1204 to 1342. Bakhtiyar Khalji's notion of acquiring legitimacy for the conquest was first to follow the Islamic practices of khutbah, sikka and raising mosques, etc,. For the local population occupation of territory and change in political authority had greater impact, such as presence of a powerful cavalry was a visible reality of their defeat in the hands of outsiders. Considering the political significance of coinage, Bakhtiyar Khalji struck a gold coin in the name of Muhammad bin Sam with one side depicting a Turkish cavalryman charging at full gallop holding a mace in hand, at the bottom an emblem with the legend 'Gauda Vijaye' in Sanskrit. If his target was not the local elements he would not have used the nagri script.[87] Six years later Ali Mardan Khalji declared independence from Delhi and issued silver coins in his name when he also used the horseman image. When Iltutmish restored hegemony over Bengal and coins were minted in his name which bore the same image. Possibly this was done with the political motive to highlight the message that cavalry was the main pillar of their military strength by which they successfully subjugated the local rulers. Sanskrit legend of '*Sri Chandicharana Parayana*' was used in

the coins of Danujmardandev and Mahendradev. Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah, the converted son of Raja Ganesh, started the custom of minting his coins with kalima inscribed to assert his commitment to the newly accepted faith of Islam. But later, after securing his position with the ulama and the nobility, he acknowledged his relationship with Raja Ganesh by simply adding to his name 'bin Kans Rai' on his coins.[88]

By this time<early 15th century> the Islamic concept of assertion of political authority through coinage diffused throughout the Delta and confirmed the numismatic tradition of the Indo-Turkish rulers of Bengal. A huge commemorative silver coin issued from Pandua mint 1421, with a lion figure, 105grs in weight and 6.7 cm in width, was specially minted for presentation to the Emperor of China through the Chinese envoys and soldiers living in Pandua Court in the reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah.[88a] But even on the ordinary coins of the same Sultan, the lion motif was used. A.H. Dani draws our attention to Tripura coinage, noting that rulers of this small hill kingdom depicted lion on their coins, also suggesting that in addition to re-conquering southern Bengal, Sultan Jalaluddin may also have conquered Tripura and issued same style of coins in order to get popular support over there.[89] But earliest Tripura coins with lion stamp did not appear before 1464, thirty-two years after Sultan Jalaluddin's death. Lion motif could have been a more generalized symbol of political authority used by the rulers in the Delta. The Husain Shahis boldly presented themselves as indigenous rulers to the people of Bengal and their political pragmatism dictated them to perform the most royal of all public deeds, minting of coins, where Nassiruddin Nusrat Shah was simply described 'Sultan bin Sultan' — he was Sultan because his father was Sultan, the most powerful gesture in hereditary monarchy.[90]

Primary benefit of having a stable currency was, of course, economic. Every Sultan issued coins in his name and circulated in such way that this could be the main contact point between the state and foreign and local merchants operating in the market. Tome Pires reported that Bengal coins were in circulation in foreign markets. The demand for textile, sugar and rice produced in Bengal and exported to South-east Asia, Ceylon, Malabar coast, Maldives, Gulf countries, Arabia and coastal Africa, etc., enhanced the value of currency through trade.

Coinage was dependent on availability of metals, precious and

ordinary. Till recently scholars were of opinion that gold particularly was in short supply during the post-10th century India.[91] But it has been convincingly shown in current researches that the existence of billion (alloy of silver and copper), bronze and copper coins reveal the presence of money economy able to meet the needs of trade and commerce. There was thus a continuous presence of currency from 10th century onwards. This opinion goes against Prof. Irfan Habib's observation about lack of source for gold leading to its paucity.[92] Gold mines in Karnataka were exhausted; very little amount was available in sands brought down by the Himalayan rivers; for supply of silver existence of any important mines is not known from the sources. Simon Digby suggests that most of the gold came from Eurasian sources, also from the gold mines of West Africa through the Mameluk Kingdom gold was circulated in Eastern trade.[93] From the accounts of Wassaf and Umari it is known that India absorbed limitless quantity of imported gold and silver without exporting by anyway. Ilkhanid Mongols exported gold from Iran to India.[94] In the early years of Turkish invasions there was depletion by plunder of gold hoarded in rich temples which had consequent effect on urban and rural economy of northern India. Muslim traders and merchants brought gold and silver from all parts of the world to India. The 'nishithachurni' speaks of gold-dust obtained from stone blocks and sands by a system of washing.[95]

Central Asia, Persia, Afghanistan were the principal suppliers of silver to India in the 11th century, and this trend continued even during political disturbances. But paucity of silver was noticed due to the Mongol menace in the north-west; silver crisis in Central Asia became apparent from the second half of the 10th century. Recently Simon Digby has made a scholarly attempt to foster a link between the circulation of silver coins issued by the Delhi Sultanate and its dependents, and the eastern source which included Burma, Malacca, Yunan and Tibet, all converging in Bengal which supplied the precious metal to the Delhi Sultanate.[96] It has been further pointed out that during the time of Muhammad bin Tughloq, already with the virtual loss of control of the Central Sultanate over Bengal, a relative scarcity of silver in cash economy was strongly felt. It was to meet this contingency that billion coins increased in supply in India in the 14th century.[97] Supply of precious

metal was dependent on geopolitical situation; just as during this time precious metal could be obtained through the ports of Bengal and Orissa. In the Tughloq period, the Delhi Sultanate was cut off from the coastal regions for a century or more, and the cumulative effect of reduced supply of resources could have been significant. But J.F. Richards contesting the view-point offered by W.H. Moreland, argues that there was no scarcity of precious metals in northern India and in the independent kingdoms of Bengal, Malwa, Gujrat and Jaunpur; these regions did not appreciably depart from the monetary policy of the Delhi Sultans. Inland trade was still flourishing, transacted in money, in all major areas of the Empire,[98] that extreme cheapness of all commodities, particularly of daily domestic consumption, required exchange by the smallest possible currency.[99] This problem was largely solved by the use of cowries, particularly in rural market. As natural object cowrie was always available in plenty, no expense was incurred to manufacture them. In the post-13th century period cowrie very much remained in the market. But its value in post-Turkish times went down; in the Sena period 1280 cowries were equal to a tanka and in the Sultanate period the value went down to 8906 to a tanka.

Names of an extensive number of mints situated in almost every important urban centre indicate wide circulation of coins in the Delta. For the first time specific mention of dar-us-zarb/mint-town on the coins was introduced by Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I(1442-1459); previously the custom was to mention just the name of the place from where the coins were issued.[100] As early as in the time of Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji (1211-1226) coins were decidedly issued for political and economic purposes. He immitated the Ghazni coins in type and weight which amounted to 122.2grs. His coins were accepted as model in the Delhi Sultanate.[101] In the time of Ruknuddin Kaikaus Balbani(1291-1300) some of his coins were issued from the land-revenue of Bang.[102] In the mid-14th century when Ibn Batuta visited Bengal he notice circulation of gold and silver coins and Ma Huan's comments in early 15th century has been mentioned before. Although in a general sense currency was tri-metallic, actually silver occupied major portion of the coinage; there were numerous silver coins, fewer gold coins. Out of a large number of coins discovered so far in pre-Mughal Bengal, copper coin is very scarce.

Only Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah<1342-1358> minted half tanka pieces with 83-84grs weight; he issued these coins in imitation of fractional coins of the Delhi Sultans.[103] But in both cases the policy was a failure indicated by rarity of fractional coins. It is possible that in small transactions commodities were so cheap that these could mostly be bought in cowries, and this was one of the reasons for the failure of the experiment. When Mukundaram mentions 'tanka' and 'ana' the reference was not a metal piece of small denomination, but may be an unit for counting cowries.

Large influx of silver coins in the Hussain Shahi period suggests considerable increase in trading activities. M.R. Tarafdar gives a very useful table of maximum weight of coins issued by Hussain Shahi Sultans.[104] A number of Hussain Shahi coins containing the term 'Khazanah' indicates that those were issued directly from the central Treasury. Three types of silver coins of Hussain Shahi rulers are available so far, average weight of which are 160grs, 80grs, and 40grs. While the first type is represented by numerous issues with varying weight from 148grs to 170grs., second and third types are available comparatively less in number. There three types stood for full, half and quarter of a rupee respectively. Most of the Nusrat Shahi coins with different weight and denomination were struck possibly to facilitate transactions in urban centres. This is to be noted here that due to expansion of overseas trade the average weight of Hussain Shahi coins, 166grs, was higher than that of contemporary Lodi coins which had a standard weight of 245grs, generally. Issue and circulation of gold coins was rare compared to silver coins. Less than ten in number gold coins have been discovered in pre-Mughal Bengal, average weight of which were 167grs approximately. Gold coins were generally issued on special occasions like coronation, victory celebration, presentation to foreign rulers, in short commemorative rather than functional.

As monarchy was largely dependent on mercantile economy, Sultans extended patronage to traders and merchants. A new ruler struck coins in his own name, not only to assert his legitimacy and sovereign power, but also to establish contact with the trading community through coinage. As has been already mentioned that Tome Pires noticed in the early 16th century Bengal coins had circulation in foreign countries.[105] It is a possibility that the Sultans sent coins by merchants to have contact with

traders and rulers there. Coins were largely used in urban markets and were circulated by the trading community at home and abroad. These were medium of publicity for the nobles, the administrators, the ulama, the manufacturers and common people – all who came to know about certain political and economic informations of the realm. M. R. Tarafdar is of opinion that old coins of a former Sultan were melted at the start of the reign of a new Sultan; silver was saved by calling back the old coins from the urban markets and also from the Khazanah and mints.[106] These coins were melted, struck and reissued in the name of the reigning monarch. Scarcity of coins in later Hussain Shahi period indicates less availability of silver in the Khazanah and taksals. Stable and more or less continuous coinage of high value and demand of Bengal coins point out to a remarkably favourable balance of trade leading to a flourishing urban economy.

The sources do not show any scarcity in gold reserve during the Tughloq period. Ibn Batuta observed that officials of the Sultanate presented gold and silver utensils in the form of bowls, ewers and other things. They also made solid pieces of gold and silver in the shape of bricks which they called 'khisht' and 'nazranas' on special days and festive occasions were usually offered in gold.[99] But in recent researches there is a general impression that there was shortage of silver all over the world including India. Nelson Wright observes,... 'apart from Bengal sources of silver supply in India were scanty'.[100] As a result of scarcity debasement was almost inevitable. Irfan Habib remarks that 'it is possible that tradition here has reverse cause and effect, with a world-wide shortage of silver, a continuous fall in prices had been taking place for a long time. The peasants must have found it a great hardship to sell enough in order to be able to pay revenue in cash.....'[101] The exchange value of coins during the Sultanate period shows a highly organized currency system. Relative value of copper and silver were, however, changing periodically. For the later period, W.H. Moreland has shown that silver remained more or less constant except in Bengal, copper increased in value in Gujrati pice<1616>; Simon Digby makes an equation between copper and silver.[102] Although in a later period Venetian merchant Caesar Fedrici<in Asia from 1563-1581> left Pegu for Chatgaon and observed 'between which two places there was much

commerce in silver'. Blochmann confirms this and comments 'the export of silver from Pegu to Bengal may have supplied her mints with silver'. Some quantity of silver may also have come from through Assam where silver pieces, even for small fraction of a tanka, 'was still current'.

Turkish rulers in Bengal were issuing coins regularly and continuously for a long span of time. Their currency served the twofold purpose: political, by right of sikka assertion of sovereignty ; and economic, coins as medium of exchange in trade and commerce. With consolidation of Turkish political authority in the Delta, number of coins and their denominations were on the increase. This was an indication of expansion of both internal and external trade. Ma Huan's observation is significant when he says, ....in every purchase and sale they all use this coin for calculating prices in petty transactions. The cowrie goes by the foreign name of 'kaoli' and in trading they calculate in units<of this article>.[103] This he said in reference to the use of silver tanka in Bengal. Growth of urban centres like Satgaon, Chatgaon, Sonargaon, sprawling markets in Gaur-Pandua in the 14th and 15th centuries indicate progress in urbanization, trade surplus and stable monetary economy. Mints grew up in almost all town and cities of the Sultanate. Silver used to be imported by foreign trade through Pegu from China and some South-Asian countries. Bengal currency was dependent on imported silver. Tome Pires gave important detail about the type of money economy which prevailed in early 16th century Bengal. Buying and selling in gold, silver and cowrie was an important source of profit for Bengal. Both gold and silver from Bengal fetched higher rates in Malacca<1/6% more in gold and 1/5% more in silver>. He has also given a relative value of Bengal tanka and Malaccan currency with weight, and cowrie to tanka<16 pan made 1 kahan, 80 cowries made a pan, 1280 cowries made a kahan, 8906 cowries made a tanka, etc.,>. Cowrie had circulation in Arakan and port Martaban in Pegu; along with gold and silver transaction in cowrie was common in Bengal and Orissa. Cowrie was generally imported from the Maldives.[104]

# 8

# Trends in Urbanisation : Economy, Constituents and Typology

For understanding the urban process of a particular period it is important to evolve a meaningful framework, conceptual, chronological and physical, in short, a perspective to deal the topic in totality. City by itself is an abstraction unless it is fed with some concrete components. The elements by which a city is conceptualised are the functional integration of its residents, its social and economic structure, mobility and transportation system. It is to be noted here that state endowments, means of communication and transport, and major trading centres are important ingredients of urbanisation, but they are only 'dependent variable' and can, in no way, be the constituent element of urbanisation.[1] Indian scholars have taken the perception of feudalism as the central theme to determine the reasons for the growth and decline of urban centres in pre-1200 period.[2] But the theoretical premises for the economy of the Sultanate period has been posed in a different way : a school of other scholars are of opinion that in the Sultanate period feudalism of pre-1200 type did not exist; it was a kind under which a large share of surplus produced by the peasantry was shifted to the urban centres for the consumption of the ruling class, despite the rural economy being controlled by local zamindars.[3] Prof. Nurul Hasan provides a 'modified' version

of feudalism in the context of medieval Indian society.[4] This type of feudalism could have the potential of playing a significant role in the growth of urban economy. The foreign elements representing a new ruling cum appropriating class, were themselves basically city-dwellers from the beginning, initially concentrated their energy on occupying and controlling urban centres first, and brought rural areas under their fold later. According to Prof. Hasan, establishment and growth of cities and qasbahs was largely the result of 'new forms of agrarian relationship' due to (i) huge demand of handicrafts by the local authorities; (ii) supply of commodities needed for maintenance of standing army, mostly stationed in towns; to facilitate internal and external commerce.[5] Prof. Irfan Habib is of opinion that this agrarian relationship was, in fact, a new system of 'agrarian exploitation' by the ruling class having no stake or interest in land directly; This system gave rise to urban centres of 'parasitical' nature.[6] In another essay he says that urban growth 'chiefly rested on the surplus extracted by the ruling class in the form of land-tax (kharaj/mal), which was mainly distributed among its members, and its dependents and retainers living within the towns. It was out of this large amount of revenue collected through kharaj from the iqtas and the khalisa that 'the Islamic principalities kept their armies and supported the existence of their large and numerous towns.'[7]

Prof. Brajadulal Chattopadhyay does not quite agree with the previous opinions. He says that the idea of the spurt of urbanism several centuries after earlier phase has become 'moribund' at present. There are fewer reasons to support the view that medieval urbanism became possible only with a noticeable revival of India's external trade network or with the arrival of new cultural elements with the establishment of the Sultanate. Significant changes were already evidenced in the earlier period to which the Sultanate economy added substancially. Prof. Habib, in suggesting that there was 'considerable expansion of urban economy' during the Sultanate, is fully convincing. Prof. Chattopadhyay suggests that the degree and nature of this expansion should be assessed in relation to the kind of change that was already taking place in the pre-1200 period.[8]

The surplus which constituted the subsistence base for

urbanisation, covered a wide range of commercial and industrial items, including commercial crops. This whole process was related to a productive hinterland through which the interaction between towns and cities and their rural context has to be taken into consideration. The process of mobilisation of surplus through production of agricultural items and collection by landtax was the chief economic activity of the time with an elaborate official mechanism acting behind it. This complex structure was responsible for drawing the rural productive units and groups, with exchangeable commercial items, into the network of urban centres. The ruling class, consisting of various elite groups along with the land-assignees, were the consumers of high value commodities; the ultimate destination of the surplus collected from rural production moved towards them. It is difficult to make out a clear-cut defmition of medieval economy divided into 'urban' and 'rural'. There were several things in common to village and town-life. In medieval economy the distinction between 'rural' and 'urban' was one of degree and not of kind - the village exhibited more features of agricultural economy, while cities exposed more of commercial economy. The concept of 'grama-nagara' polarity, in spatial and social terms, was more ideal than real.[9] 'By nature of social formations in medieval period urban centres represented only an extension of that of the countryside'.[10] But this conception of rural-urban continuum without a clear-cut demarcation of rural-urban boundaries may create some confusion. In this regard some important queries have been posed by R. Champakalakshmi.[11] : (i) What are the links between agricultural production and urban growth? - is the degree to which agricultural growth and the availability of a surplus a necessary precondition to urban growth?

(ii) Does an increase in commerce and overseas trade, and the consequent emergence of centres of commodity exchange or an entrepot market, stimulate agricultural production?

(iii) To what extent do towns develop as centres of commodity production or distribution centres in relation to internal economy, as opposed to the growth of towns in response to the demands of overseas trade?

Study of the rise and decline of urban centres in medieval period

in terms of the rise and decline of trade and commerce has received due importance in recent researches; urbanisation has been closely related to trade pattern of a particular area in period under study. Burton Stein's model of 'segmentary state' includes temple-urbanisation of the 12th and 13th centuries and the changing scene of declining political power in South India.[13] The relation between the decline of political power and the decline of trade has been given ample attention by modern scholars; some are of opinion that overseas trade was incidental in urban development process and not a causal factor. But it can not be denied that decline of overseas trade led to decline of urban centres, most of which were ports, internal or external, or emporia of trade. A further step towards the acceleration of the process of urbanisation was the development of organized trade through merchants and traders or their guilds, specialization in marketing of some special local commodities, and exotic luxury items, through towns and ports. Revival of active participation in international trade and emergence of coastal towns with a shift in the location of major ports were oriented to serve new hinterlands. A conspicuous shift from agricultural to non-agricultural economic activities, and commercial agriculture in some centres was a major part of this process.

Pattern of physical growth is not very clear in the period under study due to the paucity of enough archaeological evidence. It has created limitations to determine the sequence in the process of development from smaller to larger settlements, with no scope to identify the characteristics of socio-economic activities the inhabitants pursued. Functional types of cities are generally revealed through the economic activities of the residents. But it is important to note that the number of persons engaged in a particular activity does not characterise the type of a city. In most of the medieval towns the number of persons engaged in money transactions, trade and related functions was small, but they exercised considerable influence in the social and economic life of an urban population; it is equally true about the ruling class.

To consider the geographical region/spatial limit in urban process is a highly significant factor: scarce to dense population, climatic

condition, vegetation, strategic routes, and above all, nodal points providing congenial situation for trading caravans, encouraged considerable foreign settlements in towns. Some areas in the deltaic region had the essential natural advantage for cultivation of food-grains and cash-crops due to fertility of soil and better natural facilities for irrigation, particularly present in the plains, this indicates greater scope for demand of labour, increased possibility of intensive market and encouraged trade and commerce leading to brisk urban activities. For natural reasons riverports at the confluence of navigable rivers, or towns at the crossroads of trade routes became marketing and distributing centres with marked facilities for transportation for collection of raw/manufactured materials and commodities from tributary areas around. There are two types of mobility noticeable in the period under review: (i) spatial/territorial and (ii) social. Territorial mobility is very much physical and related to the spatial pattern of urban growth.[14]

There is another side for discussing the typology of urban centres available from the analysis of the sources. It has generally been accepted as a fact that Islam as a sociocultural process, from its very inception, was urban oriented. According to Prof. Irfan Habib 'urbanism as a way of life is its core.' When the Turkish conquerors settled here they naturally chose existing towns and cities to colonise and gradually exercised their control over countryside through a new and elaborate mechanism called 'iqta', headquarters of which were situated in towns and cities. 'Dominance of urban centres on countryside was inherent in the socio-political ideology of Islam'.[15]

Some towns and cities grew out of rural settlement, some out of fortresses, others from pilgrim sites, etc. It has already been pointed out that a sufficiently productive agricultural economy with a large surplus was disposed to non- agricultural sectors, which required a highly favourable agricultural production system for the sustenence of that kind of urban economy. At the same time, the principal appropriators of the agricultural surplus, the ruling class and their retainers and dependents, could easily afford to live in the cities, because, their right on the supply of commodities for consumption did not depend on their presence on the land, thus making them viable

and strong urban class participating in the power structure closely. This factor played an important role in the growth of administrative headquarters. The new ruling class encouraged pockets of defence and administration in order to exercise firmer grip over the vast areas under their control by iqta system. Thus it is obvious that more the number of iqtas the greater the scope for growth of towns and qasbas. Forts and garrisons grew into large Muslim colonies/'junuds' which were finally grown into big cities/'amsar'. Forts were the backbone of the military strength of the ruling class. Classical examples in the Sultanate period could be taken from 'garhs' and garrisons of Rajasthan. Fort-towns were generally catered by traders, artisans and cultivators. Most of the times older forts and fort-areas around were occupied, or strategic points were chosen from military point of view, inevitably selected for proximity of grazing fields, cultivated land, also availability of transportation animals, so that water, fodder, food and other supplies were assured for the troops and horses. Almost always the foundation or development of towns by the initiative and patronage of the ruling class, an already emergent process was taken into consideration, whether in case of 'core-centre' or/and a 'ceremonial-centre' in areas where necessary. Religion in medieval period was a constant denominator of legitimisation of all human endeavour - political, economic and social; thus religious/ritualistic/ ceremonial factors led to the growth and sustenence of urban centres. Religious groups controlled education system and were upholders of ideology and law, and as such a seat of bearing was an important factor in the growth of ceremonial/pilgrim towns. A major religious centre participating in the pilgrimage network, could have been a super- local centre for consumption of goods by local residents, as well as pilgrims from outside, and for activities of religious institutions and edifices. In these centres trade was secondary factor, religious activity was dominant and persistent, though not necessarily the sole factor. Muslims founded mosques right after conquest, even before trading and administrative activities started. But ceremonial and ritual centres, as dominant urban settlements, were themselves a part of a system of both mobilization and redistribution. Port-towns provided services to both hinterland and maritime organisation, it is, therefore,

a 'knot' where ocean and inland transport lines meet and intertwine; it was a close connector to hinterland. By its essential characteristics the layout plan of a port-town is widely different from an internal town; these required wide roads, organized shopping centres, etc., for which particularly a strong labour- force was necessary to provide commodities and services. These factors had multiple effect stimulating the process of urbanisation. These centres were also inhabitated by different nationalities which had cosmopolitan requirements. Their multiple activities included presence of market and wear-houses for collection, storage, distribution, buying and selling of commodities, and also handling of exports and imports. They acted as check-posts for commercial taxes which yielded high revenue to the state. Presence of large number of merchant-groups suggest that most of them were served as halting places for itenerant traders. Gradual commercialization of agricultural economy and demand for various commodities, produced and manufactured for urban consumption, led to the growth of these towns. The driving force behind their affluence was trade and industrial activities. Two types of port-towns are available in the sources, oceanic ports and river ports.

Most of the urban settlements were pluralistic by the very nature of the multiplicity of their economic activities; the resident pursued various types of economic activities in the same urban centre. Following are some of the multipurpose activities served by the pluralistic urban centres: (i) towns as halting place of troop movement/ cantonments, used as interdependent agents of political synthesis (ii) royal policy directed towards active encouragement of overseas trade accelerated the growth of port-towns, which protected wearhouses and godowns for merchant groups on major trade routes; (iii) religious institution-related urbanisation fostered trading and commercial activities along with the observance of ceremonial functions, festivals and fairs.

Due to meagreness of source material it is not possible to determine the level or degree of urbanisation measured in terms of ratio between city-dwellers and countryside population. Trading and commercial activities are the primary determinants of the level of

urbanisation. Only comparison can be made with higher degree of urbanisation in ports and commercial centres to other towns less exposed to more viable economic activities. It has been accepted by the scholars that the pace of urbanisation was faster in the Sulanate than in pre-1200 period; although there is controversy regarding the character and constituents of urban growth determined in pre-Muslim conquest period.[16] Coming down from pre-1200 period the terminology as seen in place names is an indicator of urban features 'pura', 'nagara' , 'pattana' as suffix or a new name with such suffixes was usually given to an expanded centre or to a new area within the expanding centre. The term 'pattana' sometimes referred to coastal town or port, but interior town with that suffix is also available[17]. The method of considering the hierarchy among urban centres and the nature of their interrelation could be useful, for, urban activities tended to move more towards core-region where generally capital and administrative centres were situated. Although there was perceptible change in the character of urban population from the 13th century onwards, compared to the Mughal period the pace of urban growth was much slower in the Sultanate period. Reasons lay in the economic and social organisations of the towns and cities during the period under consideration.

It is difficult to identify a single autonomous causative factor in the nexus of social, political and economic transformations which resulted in the progress of urbanisation in Bengal. A prosperous economy based on trade-surplus, standardised metallic currency of high value, a system of collection of revenue in cash, i.e., a more effective system of exploitation of agricultural surplus for urban consumption, a stable political system under dynastic monarchies, continuity of some economically viable traditions from the previous period, and addition of a new socio-cultural process, all contributed to the progress of urbanisation in post-1200 period in Bengal's history. Immediately with the establishment of rule the process of urbanisation could not have been accelerated; the history of the 13th century was one of invasion, confrontation and gradual occupation of unpacified territories. In the 14th century Bengal was found to be included in the international trade-route, centres for production of manufactured

goods and urban centres were gradually organised and activised. From the early 14th century mints were established in several towns, textile and other commodities were manufactured for export, only then the economic situation could change to a viable urban process.

Metallic currency system, which was one of the main indicators of the economic prosperity of the time, is clearly manifested by the presence of mints in all important urban centres. Names of mint-towns under different Turkish rulers are generally known from the numismmatic source.[18] The system of specifying the name of mint which issued a particular set of coins was introduced for the first time by Nasiruddin Mahmud--1 (1436). Gaur/ Lakhnauti/ Muhammadabad/ Hussainabad/Jannatabad, Pandua/Firuzabad, Mymensingh/Muazzamabad, Faridpur/Fatahbad, Bagerhat/ Khilafatabad, Rajshahi-Dinajpur/Barbakabad, Rajmahal/ Tanda,Satgaon, Sonargaon, Chatgaon - covering almost all the parts of Bengal, had mints.Thomas gives the names of eleven mint-towns of which two are new - Shahr-i-Nau and Ghyaspur.[19] Blochmann adds three more names to Thomas's list - Fatahbad, Khilafatabad and Hussainabad.[20] Gaur by the virtue of being the capital city, was the central mint-town, dar-us-zarb, and it also had the central Treasury/the Khazanah. From the names of mint-towns economic control and extension of kingdom was indicated; territorial extent in the independent Sultanate was the largest in the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519), also largest number of coins struck in the seven mints during his time have been discovered. The post of darogah-i-taksal, a high official in the government, is indicative of the importance given to the organisation and administration of the mints. Minting and issuing of coins was disrupted sometimes, in the time of political crisis and power-struggle, uncertain succession, short reign of a weak ruler, etc.. Immense economic importance of currency and cashnexsus , and socio-political significance of the Islamic custom of sikka related to the idea of sovereignty has been discussed before. In the physical formation of medieval urban centres in Bengal mints played a very significant role.

In the composition of medieval towns and cities Islamic religious institutions in general and mosques in particular played an important

role. One monument to cast a shadow of influence on both the ulama and the sufi elites was the 'jami' mosque, which was the physical embodiment of orthodox Islam ,it was central to Islamic politics and society. It had multiple purpose to serve by being used as a platform for political contact, meeting place for rich and poor alike to express 'ijma', to declare names of ruling monarchs, Sultans of Delhi and Khalifahs of Islam, to have 'khutba' read and as centre of socio-religious festivals. Often madrasahs were attached to mosques from where Islamic sciences were taught and Islamic culture was spread by imparting religious education. Some other Islamic social-welfare institutions were generally attached to a big mosque. It was also a centre around which fairs and festivals were held and economic activities went on vigorously. Power and prestige of the royalty and the nobility used to be expressed by founding and patronising religious institutions. Jami mosques were built in important ports and administrative headquarters along trade-routes where community interests brought together the royalty, the nobility, the religious groups and the trading class[21]. It was also used as a lever to placate the urban sufi elites and the ulama who were made custodians for the maintenance of these institutions. Through the religious institutions and groups the state kept control on a vast number of people from all walks of life. Compared to the jami mosques, founded and financed by the royalty and the nobility, community patronage system sustained generally and worked through the dargahs. Often burial places of illustrious Sufis, sometimes even of famous Sultans turned into pilgrim-towns where the most dominant and powerful section was the theological class, although minority in number. Some of the important mosques in medieval Bengal can be cited for example, Adina and Eklakhi mosques in Pandua,Gunamanta,Darasbari,Tantipara, Borosona, Chotosona, Lattan, Kadamrasul, etc. in Gaur, Satgumbaz in Bagerhat,Baraduari in Hooghly Pandua, Zafar Khan mosque in Triveni-Saptagram, and innumerable others small and big in the region.[22]

In a political system which was largely dependent on the military, forts and garrisons were indispensable. In the 13th century one of the main reasons of the defeat of the Hindu chieftains and overlords

in the hands of the Turkish army was that they failed to protect their forts and inevitably military strength along with political power passed on to the new-comers.A town with fort was called 'khittah' and without one was 'qasbah', 'shahr' was the commercial centre, and 'ganj' was the collection and distribution centre of agricultural produces, the destination of which was ultimately the big cities,katra' was a general term used for market-place; often katras were attached to mosques. Generally the physical features of a fortcentered town were the fort/qillah/garh/kote with high boundary walls, ditch surrounding the whole area, watchtower, marketplace, place of prayer and camps and garrisons inside; around these townships developed. Often than not forts formed an integral part of royal residences in capital cities. Fort-town often grew as parallel capital. Both Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah and Sikander Shah took shelter in Ekdala fort during Firuz Shah Tughloq's invasions of Bengal.[23] Garh Mandaran, Chandraketugarh, Bangarh, etc., were pre-Turkish fort-towns. It is to be noted here that Bakhtiyar Khalji, despite conquering Lakhnauti, founded his capital in Devkote; one of the reasons for this decision was that Bangarh had been already there. Minhaj says that the country of Lakhnauti was on both sides of the Ganges consisting of two wings, eastern one was called Varendri to which Devkote belonged.[24] It was identified by Buchanan with the old fort near Damdamah , on the left bank of the river Purnanabha, south of Dinajpur. In the early period of occupation Minhaj refers to Devkote as only 'second to Lakhnauti'. But according to Blochmann Devkote was situated in Gangarampur near Damdamah where the oldest Muslim inscription has been discovered.[25] Tughrilgarh or Narqillah was said to be founded by Mughisuddin Tughril (1278-1283) and Bishankot was built by Ghyasuddin I'waz Khalji(1213-1227); from the name of the latter fort it seems more likely that it was an older one and was restored by Ghyasuddin I'waz to serve military purpose. Garh Mandaran remained a bone of contention between Bengal Sultans and the Kings of Orissa. In recent research Mandaran has been identified as a mint-town in the time of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah<1481-1487>.[26] Garh Ekdala was the most famous fort coming down from the previous period, restored to its older glory during the

14th century and continued to Hussain Shahi period. There is strong difference of opinion among historians about the situation of this fort. From Barani's description it appears that the fort was situated on a river bank. Some are of opinion that the fort was situated 42 miles away from Lakhnauti and 23 miles from Pandua in the north, and 15 miles from Ghoraghat on the river Tanggon.[27] Hussain Shah shifted his capital to Ekdala for strategic reasons. Gaur and Pandua communicated with different parts of the country along the courses of the Ganges, the Bhagirathi, the Mahananda and the Kalindi. Contact was kept with such strategic positions as the passes of Teliagarhi and Sikrigali. Ekdala obviously had approaches to Devekote and Gaur - Pandua by land route. Along with its strategic position it must have had considerable commercial viability to contribute to the economic life of Bengal. The fort of Gaur has not been mentioned by Minhaj and Barani. Cunningham describes Gaurfort as being situated on the 'banks of the Ganges and having been encircled by very high rampart wall, at each corner of which was a 'burz' and gate. The whole area was surrounded by a deep ditch; Dakhildarwaza, the main gate to the palace is still partly in tact. According to Cunningham this fort was built by the Mahmud Shahi Sultans in the 15th century. Although Teliagarh/garhi was the gateway to Bengal from the west, it has not been mentioned by Minhaj and Barani. It is a possibility that due to its strategic position it was used as a transit station for garrisons and no new fort was built on it. Garh Jaripa was located in Sherpur in modern Mymensingh district, which was mentioned in the Firuz Shahi inscrption of Guamalati.[29] From the above mentioned facts it becomes clear that fort in the medieval period was one of the most important constituents in the growth of urban process and served multiple purpose of strategic importance, security and commercial benefit.

Meagerness of revenue literature, due to the absence of official history of the Bengal Sultans, lead to the problem of documentation regarding the growth of urban centres for administrative purposes. Administrative headquarters and capitals were selected for communication facilities, either on important land- routes or waterways or both, for strategic position of defence and security, for

commercial viability, and over and above everything, in the close proximity of a fertile hinterland around, so that the ruling class could keep better control on the vast areas through iqta system i.e., their main source of income by land-revenue, and supply of foodstuff and commodities for urban consumption. This policy gave impetus to the development of qasbahs and small towns apart from capitals and commercial emporia. From the inscriptions we come to know, in a very general sense , about administrative units like 'iqlim' 'arsah' 'mulk' shiq, etc,. From Todor Mall's Rent Roll (1582) we know that Bengal was divided into 19 sarkars and 682 mahals. Among the 19 sarkars mentioned only eight, and in 682 mahals 208 had Muslim names, and the rest had Hindu names. Every revenue unit had an official headquarter and this was generally a city/port/town which served as centre of local administration. In the 13th and 14th centuries during Turkish occupation period Hindu names of urban centres, available in coins and inscriptions, were later gradually changed into Muslim names; this was due to the culture assertion of the new ruling class. Almost inevitably mints and jami mosques, occasionally forts, were located in the administrative centres. Out of 19 sarkars and 20 mint-towns in total at least six names belonged to pre-Turkish conquest times;most of them belonged to the previous period, restored and regenerated from the 13th century.[30]

Capital-city was the main power-centre; Gaur/Lakhnauti, in case of Bengal, has been widely reflected and recorded in various sources, like Delhi court-chronicles, epigraphic and numismmatic sources, accounts of foreign travellers and vernacular literature. From the description of foreign travellers it gives the impression of a beautiful 'Islamic' city with all the essential physical features, like, a high rampart wall with gates, burz, watchtowers, the citadel, residential palaces of the royalty and the nobility, jami mosques. minars, seraikhanas, hammams, tanks, main square/the chowk with broad streets, commercial centres, etc. Centralization of political power in the control of dynastic monarchies and growth of a stable multisection nobility prompted numerous nobles to move from outside to inside the city-wall, where they built their mansions. Royal palace was the symbol of supreme political power and jami mosque was the most

important religious establishment. Gradually clusters of suburbs began appearing beyond the outer walls and transformed the city into a megapolis. The city reflected commercial prosperity of the Sultanate; from here diplomatic relations and trade-contact with other foreign countries were maintained and carried on. Pandua was the capital of Bengal in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was the capital under the House of Raja Ganesh(1415 -1436) recorded in much detail with great appreciation in the Chinese sources. Turkish rulers used to transfer their capital for strategic reasons and other conveniences - first it was in Devkote, then Lakhnauti, after that Pandua, then again Gaur, Tanda in Mughal period, then in Dacca, and finally Murshidabad. Transfer of capital had both positive and negative aspects - a place declined if capital was shifted, but a new place developed if capital was established there.[31]

The special economic context where international trade flourished, ports naturally played the most viable role in the urban process. In the Sultanate period both internal riverbank ports and coastal towns made much progress. The port-towns of Bengal could be compared to the contemporary commercial centres of Gujrat and Vijaynagar kingdoms which fell on the same trade route and had similar kind of trading system. Economic prosperity and importance of these ports were mostly dependent on foreign trade, and as such significant foreign community of traders was always present there, which is evident from the account of foreign travellers[32]. The vernacular literature, specially the Mangalkavyas, are full of references to baniks and saudagars, which prove regrouping of social sections in urban centres due to trade surplus. In the independent Sultanate period Satgaon and Chatgaon were the most prosperous port-towns in Bengal. Trading communities and the ruling class were allied together, participated in trading activities and moved closely.[33]

It is difficult to make out the level and extent of urbanisation on which was dependent the size, number and population of urban centres. In the process of Islamisation of polity old pre-1200 names of urban centres were being changed; from these names only it is difficult to determine which cities and towns were restored and which were newly founded in the Sultanate period. There are three urban

centres mentioned in the epigraphic source and accounts of travellers: (i) Shahr-i-Nau, (ii) Habank and (iii) Bengala. (i) The name Shahr-i-Nau has been found out in one of the coins of the Ilyas Shahi Sultan, Sikandar Shah (1379).[34] It is possible that the new city was founded in the early Ilyas Shahi period. Later it has been mentioned in the account of Nicolo Conti; - Yule is of opinion that Nicolo Conti's 'Cernave' is identical with Shahr-i-Nau[35]. But Dr. Enamul Haq says that according to Mirat-i-Madari Gaur was called Shahr-i-Nau.[36] This opinion does not seem to be tenable, from the very beginning of Turkish invasion and occupation the capital, in different sources, was termed either as Lakhnauti or as Gaur; Dr. Haq does not give any reason for why Lakhnauti/Gaur, a pre- Turkish occupation ancient city, should be called a New City. Some are of opinion that Shahr-i-Nau was Pandua, the older and alternate capital of Bengal; but the same argument goes against the suggestion without being backed up by further sources. It is a possibility that Shahr-i-Nau was a prosperous internal port-town, where Verthema (1503-1508) met Christian traders who used to go to Gaur.[37] The location of the city has not yet been determined.

(ii) Famous Morroccan traveller Ibn Batuta, (1346) in his Rehala, has given a graphic description of a city called 'Habank' without physical identification; the name is conspicuously missing in coins, inscriptions and other sources. But according to Batuta, the Blue River/'al-Nahr-al Azrak' coming down from the Kamru mountain-ranges passed by this splendid city - 'the grandest and the most beautiful of places'. By taking the route of the Blue River one could go to the country of Lakhnauti, and on both its banks there were waterwheels, gardens and villages, the landscape compared to that of Egypt by the Nile.[38] It is difficult to identify Batuta's Habank and al-Nahr-al Azrak. Dr. N.K. Bhattashali has indicated two sites as possibilities: (i) 'Bhanga' a hillock at the confluence of the Surma and the Kusiara, the two branches of the Barak; (ii) 'Habang', about 6 miles north-west of Sylhet - BlueRiver is identical with the Surma which led to Lakhnauti via Sonargaon. Recently R.M.Eaton identifies it as Habiganj in Sylhet district.[39]

Batuta's account gives the description of a city adjacent to an

area rich in agricultural resources. Although we do not know much about rural-urban relationship, but it is possible to infer in this case that this type of urban centre was dependent on agricultural surplus.

(iii) The problem of identification of the city termed as 'Bengala' is still more acute than the other two cities, because, 'Bangalah' was the term used to refer to a huge region under Turkish rule. Although 'Bengala' as a city/port -town has been mentioned in the account of foreign travellers, it is totally absent in the numismatic source, inscriptions and other literary sources of the Sultanate period. Italian traveller Verthema (1503-1508) reached Bengala from Tenasserim; it was situated on the sea and was famous for exporting silk and cotton textiles. In this city of Bengala, he says, 'there are the richest merchants I ever met'.[40] Duarte Barbosa (1518) noticed that the residents of Bengala were mostly Muslim; they owned large ships by which different types of cotton textiles, sugar and other commodities were being exported to Coromandal, Malabar, Cambay, Pegu, Tenasserim, Sumatra, Ceylon and Malacca.[41] Tome Pires also mentions Bengala as a major port which had a population of 40 thousand, and from its name the entire region was called Bengala.[42] It is curious to note that the most appreciative description of Bengala by Verthema, Barbosa and Pires has not been confirmed later by travellers like Caesar Frederick (1563) and Ralph Fitch (1585-1586) that is, within sixty to seventy five years, this port, which had such flourishing trade and economically activated trading community, either disappeared or was not noticeable anymore. In the account of later travellers Satgaon, Chatgaon and Hooghly were clearly mentioned, but Bengala was stopped being mentioned by them. According to Dr. B.N. Mukherjee ancient 'Samandar' of the Arab geographers, like al Idrisi, al Masudi, Ibn Khurdadbih, etc. , was the same with Chatgaon on the eastern waterfront, which again was synonymous to 'Bengala' of the foreign travellers of the 16th century. Others are of opinion that it was situated near the confluence of the Ganges and the Bay of Bengal, which might have gone under water in the late 16th century. It is not yet possible to come to a conclusive point without having access to more reliable archaeological sources.[43]

It is a possibility that all the three urban centres were either

founded or developed during Turkish rule. These towns had three different characteristics and thus represented three types of centres: the first one, Shahr-i-Nau, was most possibly an internal port-town, the second one, Habank, was a town situated in the background of a rich hinterland near a river, the third one, Bengala, was an oceanic port surviving on trade surplus. It is to be noted here that all three of them belonged to south and east of Bengal.[44]

During the period under review Pandua, Gaur, Satgaon, Chatgaon and Sonargaon were the five most important urban centres for their revived economic prosperity. Foreign travellers and traders entered Bengal by the port of Chatgaon and proceeded to Gaur-Pandua via Sonargaon. Their accounts are full of description of these cities. Economic base, physical features, administrative system and social groupings of these cities were closely related to the Turkish rule; thus the process of urbanisation in the independent Sultanate was best manifested by these centres which maybe considered as medieval 'Indo-Moorish' cities. Although their general characteristics were pluralistic, each of them served special purpose as well. Their economic prosperity was basically dependent upon trade, and also on agricultural surplus and these centres reflect a very high level of urbanism. It is to be noted here that in case of the above mentioned five most important urban centres all of them were examples of and continuation from pre-1200 period towns and cities.[45]

Pandua was situated twenty miles north-east of Gaur. To show the difference with Triveni-Pandua, and also for its holiness, it has always been referred in the sources as Hazrat Pandua (or 'Chhoto' Pandua and 'Boro' Pandua respectively). According to Riyaz, when Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah founded his capital in Pandua after killing Alauddin Ali Shah, the name of the city was mentioned for the first time in court history.[46] But we know that thirty years before the incident Pandua was made capital in the time of Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (1301-1322). Actually, even in the time of Alauddin Ali Shah (1341- 1342) the name of Pandua was still 'Firuzabad'. Although for emergency purpose Ilyas Shah used Ekdala as his military base, all his coins were issued from Firuzabad (Pandua) mint, which still continued to be the capital. Upto the time of Nasiruddin Mahmud

Shah (1436 - 1459) Firuzabad-Pandua remained the capital of Bengal. It was situated near the confluence of the old course of the Ganges and the Mahananda, which made it stratigically and geographically an important place. From there it was easy to communicate with all the places in north Bengal and Bihar. In old Maldah near Pandua there was a big Katra/bazar/seraikhana for traders where Firuz Shah Tughloq( 1353 - 1358) struck tents before attacking Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah; many costly commodities and luxury items were brought to the katra to give ready supply to the capital city of Pandua; these informations point towards the economic prosperity of the city. From the Chinese sources we come to know about the splendour and life style of the city - Fei Tsin (1436) writes about the luxurious life-style of the city, its high walls, well organized markets, tall columns in rows under which shops were full of commodities. Information about Pandua is available in the Chinese sources upto the late 16th century.[47] The city did not totally decline even after Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I (1436-1459) transferred the capital to Gaur.[48] Pandua can be taken as an example of 'ceremonial' urban centre or pilgrim-town as an essential element : dargahs of Jalaluddin Tabrizi, Shaykh-Alaul Haq, Shaykh NurQutb Alam, Eklakhi mausoleum, Qutb Shahi mosque, and the famous Adina mosque retained its holiness and importance as a place of pilgrimage through centuries.[49] Despite the decline in political importance, due to transfer of capital, thousands of pilgrims visited it every year. Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) ) himself went from Ekdala to Pandua on foot to visit Qutub Shah's dargah which received property rights for maintenance from him. By becoming famous as a pilgrim town Pandua retained its economic viability and was saved from permanent decline.[50]

Not only in Bengal, but in entire Hindusthan Lakhnauti/Gaur was considered to be one of the principal cities, except Delhi itself there was no other city comparable to it. Conquerors, travellers, traders, all were highly impressed by its grandeur. From pre-1200 times, like Kanauj and Delhi, it had a long continuity and tradition of being a capital-city. Hindu kings from ancient times assumed the highly honourable title of 'Gaureswara'/Lord of Gaur or 'Panchagaureswara'/ Lord of five Gaurs which huge geographical area was equivalent to

Radha, Varendri, Pundravardhana, Samatata and Banga. Hindu poets in the Turkish rule honoured their patron-Sultans by calling them 'Gaureswara'; a learned brahman biographer of Srichaitanya refers to Alauddin Hussain Shah as 'Panchagaureswara'.[51] Thus the area which was known as Panchagaur was united as 'Bangalah' under the Turkish Sultans. But in the early period, in coins and inscriptions, the Turkish rulers usually used Lakhnauti/Lakshmanavati in place of Gaur, although in a coin struck by Bakhtiyar Khalji 'Gaura-vijaye' has been inscribed. It is quite likely that the name Lakhnauti was more in use in the time of Turkish invasion. But this is to be noted here that 'Lakhnauti' was the name of an old pre-1200 period city and 'Gaur'(desa) was often termed to identify a large area, almost the whole region. It is yet to be determined whether Gaur/Panchagaur, used to being conceived as a region, geographical and ideological, if not political, as an unified territory before Turkish conquest.

From the time of the Mahmud Shahi dynasty(1442-1486) Gaur was made the permanent capital. The reason for transfer of capital was that both by land and water it was possible to have easy access to and communication between Gaur and all the other parts of the kingdom. At that time the Ganges passed close by Gaur and innumerable boats full of commodities could enter the city very easily. For a continuous time-span it was a great centre of political, administrative and commercial gravity, it physically existed covering an extensive area with an enormous population. Its physical features and cultural constituents evidenced an ideal 'Moorish' city of medieval India. Appreciative and surprised tone in the accounts of foreign travellers reveal a luxurious life-style of the city, huge palaces and mansions, the fort with rampart wall, gates, burz and ditches, broad thoroughfares, mosques, katras, seraikhanas, various entertainments, lavish feasts and festivals, drinking bouts, patronisation of the rulers to architecture and literature - all these pointing towards a refined urban culture and very high level of urbanisation. In architecture and ship-building, commercial, military and administrative organisations, in coins, inscriptions, and other manufactured items, application of technical skill and knowledge have been amply proved. It is quite evident from the sources that both agricultural and trade surplus were

at the base of its economic prosperity. The most important feature was the cosmopolitan character of its population which has been discussed later in urban demography. Despite all its glamour, Hussain Shah had to transfer the capital to Ekdala for annual seasonal inundation by flood from the Chhutia Patia and the change of the course of the Ganges, which hampered the navigability of the rivers and obstructed easy communication to the capital, Gaur. Also causes of the decline and fall of Gaur were related to factors other than natural.[53a] Even at the last stage of the decline of the independent Sultanate of two hundred years standing in utter political chaos arising out of Afghan onslaught and Mughal-Afghan rivalry in Bengal, economic setback by the entry of the Portuguese in trade scenario, it retained some of its physical and cultural splendour in its bewildering luxuries of urban life. In 1538 Humayan in Gaur was struck with wonder at the sight of beautiful palaces, fountains, and gardens having flower-beds and stone-channels of flowing water, floors and rooms of the palaces were decorated with Chinese tiles and contained valuable furnitures and luxurious curtains.[54] Commercial spectacle of international character, Islamic physical formation, huge population content, all these led Gaur to be the best and one of the largest metropolises not only in Bengal, but in the contemporary Hindustan under Turkish rule. It is the finest example of administrative city/ capital in the typology of urban centres in medieval Bengal.

We have already noted that in the initial period of Turkish occupation (1204-1338), the occupied part of Bengal was divided into three areas - Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon. Sonargaon was the principal city of East Bengal and capital of Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah(1338 - 1349). In mid-14th century, after the fall of his family from power, Sonargaon was no more the capital. In 1346 when Ibn Batuta visited Bengal, Sonargaon seemed to be inaccessible to him because it was very difficult for a foreign traveller to cross over the marshy land of its surrounding areas.[55] For geographical reasons the pace of the growth of urban centres in East Bengal was much slower than in the north and the west. When Ibn Batuta visited Bengal (1346) Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah(1338 - 1349) and Alauddin Ali Shah (1341- 1342) were engaged in power-struggle, for which Sonargaon

could have been kept specially protected and fortified. Inaccessibility of Sonargaon was utilised for political purpose, Sikandar Shah(1358 - 1391) exiled Shaykh Ala ul Haq there; Shayda, the rebel Faqir and his adherents fled towards the town of 'Sonarcawan' which was 'a very inaccessible place.'[56] Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam's grandson and other followers fled from the oppression of Raja Ganesh(1415/1417 - 1418) and took refuge there. Famous scholar Saykh Abu Tawamah founded a Sufi centre there at the end of the 13th century; Sufis from different parts of India used to come there for theological training. This was one of the reasons for Sonargaon's being respectfully referred as 'Hazrat Jalal', even long after it lost other importance as an urban centre.

Under the Sultanate Sonargaon was a good internal trading centre. Foreign traders and travellers usually landed at the port of Chatgaon and went via Sonargaon to Gaur-Pandua. Ma-Huan arrived at Chatgaon from Sumatra by ship, reached Bengal after twenty-one days, then by a small boat he "arrives at a place called 'Sona-urh-kong'".According to him the kingdom of Bengala was reached from Sonargaon by travelling 35 stages in southwesterly direction, but actual direction of Sonargaon was northwest, 250 miles away from Pandua/ Firuzabad, the capital at that time.[57] Its economic prosperty depended on rice and cotton textile. According to Fei Tsin, 'Suona-ul-kiang' was a walled city; there were tanks, roads, and markets where all kinds of commodities were bought and sold.[58] Not much information is available in the accounts of foreign travellers about this city, because, they mostly used this place as a transit station and spent very little time there on their way to Gaur and Pandua. In 1608, when capital was shifted to Dacca, Sonargaon, as the principal urban centre of East Bengal, lost its economic viability and prestige and declined for good.

Continuity in trade tradition in south-eastern region of Bengal has been mentioned before. Chatgaon was the first entry-port, the gateway to Bengal on international waterfront. This pre- Turkish times port lost its economic viability due to relative lack of commercial activities, but was restored to a spectacular height from the 14th century. In this area, ancient Harikela, there was a port which has

been mentioned by Arab geographers as 'Samandar'; it had trade contact with South India, Ceylon, West Asia and South-east Asia. Al Idrisi, as early as the 12th century, spoke of Samandar as a large town, commercial and rich, 'where there are good profits to be made'. He also indicated that it had a rich hinterland; he says that 'one day's sail from this city is a large island well-peopled and frequented by merchants of all countries' This island might have been Sandwip situated not very far from Chatgaon. Some are of opinion that 'Brahmputra' mentioned by Minhaj was the same with 'Samandar' of Arab geographers.[59] Dr. B.N. Mukherjee opines that Samandar-> Chatgaon-> Bengala are the same.[60] All these arguments and counter-arguments point out to the fact that this area had a long tradition and history of trading activities and the natural back-up of a resourceful hinterland providing the facilities for growth of port-towns.

Identification of Ibn Batuta's 'Sadkawan' has been established by Dr. N.K. Bhattashali and accepted by most scholars; although recently there is an attempt to identify 'Sadkawan' with Saptagram.[61] It was the first town of Bengal that Batuta entered, which was 'a big city on the shores of the ocean.[62] Later, when the Portuguese came to Bengal 'Chittagong' (Portuguese version of Chatgaon) was still the chief port and the main gateway to the royal capital, Gaur . Situated, as it is, at the mouth of the Meghna, this port was most convenient for navigation., All the Portuguese commanders who came to Bengal, first entered Chatgaon, in fact, for them to go to Bengal meant to go to 'Chittagong'. They named it 'Porto Grande' in contradistinction to their 'Porto Pequeno', Satgaon.[63] The Turkish rulers were comparatively late in conquering East Bengal; but by the entry of Bengal in the international trade-route and its participation in overseas trade, the contribution of Chatgaon in the prosperity of the independent Sultanate is unquestioned. From the early 16th century rivalry started over political domination and trade-control of Chatgaon between Bengal, Tripura and Arakan. Even during this crisis Alauddin Hussain Shah allowed the merchandise of the rebel kingdom of Tripura to pass through the port of Chatgaon.[64] The Bengal Sultans imposed heavy port-duty on Chatgaon, appropriation of which gave them a good share of profit. In 1513 king Dhanyamanikya of Tripura

succeeded in occupying Chatgaon. During the prolonged power-struggle for its political and economic control it was occupied in turn by opposing forces till 1517, when it was finally annexed by Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah from the chief of Arakan, who became his feudatory. Interest of West Asian merchants were so involved in Chatgaon's trade that one of them, from Baghdad, was said to have constantly instigated Nusrat Shah to reconquer it.[65] Tome Pires refer to the trade of 'Bengala' (carried on apparently through the port of Chatgaon) with Arakan and Pegu.[66] With the gradual loss of political control over Gaur, Chatgaon also began to decline and trading activities shifted more towards the south-east in Saptagram. At the last phase of Hussain Shahi period, when Mahmud Shah III (1532-1538) gave up the right of revenue collection and of building customs-houses to the Portuguese (1532) , Chatgaon's economic viability was destroyed. In typological analysis of urban centres it is probably one of the best examples of international oceanic ports in medieval India.

Satgaon, like all other major urban centres in Bengal, came down from pre-1200 period. As has been already stated that from the 8th century to the 12th century period not much is known in detail about trade situation in the eastern region, excluding of course, Samatata. In south-west Bengal Bettore, Bhurishreshtha, Chandraketugarh and Chhtrabhog retained trade-activities to a certain extent even after the fall of Tamralipti, till the emergence of Saptagram as an alternative to the latter centre. Some historians have projected Saptagram as quite an old urban centre, existing in the Pala and Sena periods. After the founding of the Turkish rule it was restored as a commercial and administrative centre, and it reached the peak of resourcefulness in the 15th century. In the middle of the 14th century Satgaon was an important administrative headquarter. Ibn Batuta (1346) found it as a rich town, with commercial viability.[68] Bakhtiyar Khalji captured Nadia and then went towards Lakhnauti avoiding south-west Bengal. After Lakshmansena left for eastern Bengal, south-west Bengal passed on to the control of the king of Jajnagar. Amir Khusrau gives the account of how Balban subjugated Tughral Khan (1281), the rebel muqti of Lakhnauti, and captured Asirgaon, the capital of south-west Bengal, then under the king of Jajnagar, and made the local Rai

Birjit Mal his vassal.[69] But there is no clear evidence in the sources to prove that Asirgaon was identical to Satgaon.The conquest of Satgaon by Zafar Khan Ghazi in the reign of Ruknuddin Kaikaus (1291 - 1301) has been recorded in an inscription in 1298.[70] But this occupation might not signify the emergence of Satgaon as a trading centre, despite its political (territorial) expansion and its administrative importance. For various reasons (already discussed) urban process was accelerated from the 14th century and Satgaon gradually evolved to a internal emporium with international trading activities.

The identification of 'Sadkawan' described by Ibn Batuta has created a long chain of controversies in the history of Bengal. The first city, after entering the region that Batuta visited, was 'Sadkawan' which was situated on the coast of the ocean; very close to it was the confluence of the Ganges and the Yun (Yamuna) which was a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus; innumerable ships were visible on the Ganges by which the people of this country fought with the residents of Lakhnauti.[71] Satgaon was situated on the Bhagirathi, away from the high seas, but Chatgaon was situated right on the Bay of Bengal . According to N.K. Bhattashali Chatgaon, which he identified as 'Sadkawan', was the main port of Gaur, from where the Portuguese used to go into the interior of Bengal; it was situated on the Meghna, which was the main waterway used for going to Gaur.[72] With the fall of Gaur Chatgaon lost its commercial importance, its trading activities declined and the centre of economic gravity was shifted to Satgaon in south-west Bengal. Bhattashali is of opinion that the Yamuna was almost totally silted in this period. But taking a late 15th century vernacular literary source into consideration some think that the Yamuna in the 15th century was a highly navigable river and 'Sadkawan's' existence at the confluence of the Bhagirathi, the Yamuna and the Saraswati (Triveni) as a place of the Hindu pilgrimage indicate Satgaon and not Chatgaon.[73] This controversy has not yet been resolved with conclusiveness without further sources.

From a coin (H. 6) of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah it is confirmed that Satgaon finally came under his control from 1346. From the time of the Tughloqs to the Mughals Satgaon has been mentioned as the centre of arsa and sarkar. So it already had been enjoying

administrative importance.[74] Restoration and revival of Satgaon was almost simultaneous with the rise of Gaur as a capital. It has already been noted that it was an important administrative headquarter of south Bengal from the 14th century and an important port from the 15th century. Since then, with a stable political situation, a prosperous hinterland, trading activities went on unhampered along the banks of the Bhagirathi. From the last decade of the 15th century a picture of the open port of Satgaon emerges in the Mangal Kavyas; it was already an important trading centre at the confluence of the Triveni/ Muktaveni as described by Bipradasa Piplai.[75] From the 14th century it had become a ceremonial centre for the Muslims also because of the already existent Zafar Khan Ghazi's dargah and a mosque there. Main items of export from this port were rice, sugar, spices and textiles. The economic viability of the area, Saptagram with its rich hinterland, has been proven by the fact that in the early 16th century Gobordhan and Hiranya, the two Majumder/majmua'dar brothers collected Rs.20 lakhs as revenue from this area which must have included customs duties as well.[76] Nityananda, the chief propagator of Srichaitanya's religious ideas, was supported by the rising Hindu merchant community there and this opened up the commercial potentiality of other satelite centres like Khardaha, Panihati, etc., along the Bhagirathi.[77] Even at the end of the 16th century Mukundaram could make a statement with ease that the traders of Saptagrama enjoyed all good things of life without going out of their hometown.

Satgaon was 'Porto Pequeno' of the Portuguese: an international community of traders, Arabs, Iranians, Indians, Portuguese, was always present there. Tome Pires(1512 - 1515) reports that the town of 'Sadegam' was a good port situated opposite to Orissa; it had a good entry-point. Many traders and merchants lived in this port ; its population was ten thousand. Caesar Frederick (1565) noticed that 'in the port of Satigam every yeere they lade thirtie and five or thirtie ships, great and small, with rice, cloth of Bombast of diverse sorts, Lacca, a great abundance of sugar, oyl of Zerzeline, and many other sorts of merchandise.' In his writing 'Satigam' with fort was a 'Moorish' city; thirty to thirty five small ships loaded with rice sugar

and textile regularly' passed on through it.[78] Gradually with the silting of the Saraswati and other riverbeds drying up, Satgaon's decline was inevitable. Even in 1515(Pires) Satgaon did not face the problem of silting of riverbed, to hamper the entry of ships. In this source of the early 16th century still Satgaon's trade prosperity is duly reflected and the Portuguese in 1536 struck a deal with Mahmud Shah III to have a revenue right and trade control. But in the mid-16th century Joao de Barros found it 'not so convenient for the entry and departure of ships'.[79] Bettore was being used as the entry point of large ships and merchandise was sent to Satgaon from there by small boats. But it was never a substitute of Satgaon; it just helped Satgaon to sustain as a port for sometime more. Decline of Satgaon historically coincided with the fall of Gaur, from the second half of the 16th century a long period of struggle for Bengal started and went on between the Bengal Sultans, the Afghans and the Mughals; like Chatgaon the trade control of Satgaon area also passed into the hands of the Portuguese. In 1542, in the time of Islam Shah Sur,Muhammad Shah Ghazi conquered Satgaon; last coin from the Satgaon mint was issued in 1550.[80] With the shift of trade balance to the Bhagirathi passing into the hands of the Portuguese, the next most important port-town, Hooghly, emerged, and with it the decline of Satgaon was complete. In the typological framework of the present study, Satgaon, although being a pluralistic urban centre, assumes significance as an internal port-town with international trading facilities.

With the change of political and social scenario the pace and character of urbanisation was determined: the five major cities, discussed before, in their physical formation, population composition and administrative system, were closely related to Turkish rule, although all of them traditionally belonged to the pre-1200 period and are valid examples of the continuity in the process of urbanisation in Bengal. Apart from the five big cities, other smaller towns developed as a fall-out of Turkish occupation : old Maldah, Devkote, Rajmahal, Tanda, etc. in north Bengal, Mandaran in south Bengal, Feni in east Bengal; Bakla, Sandwip,Sripur were also becoming important at the end of this period.[81] In the towns in north Bengal the physical

constituents were 'Islamic' in nature: fort, gates, rampart-wall, hamam, seraikhana, dargah, mosque-madrasah, katras, mint, etc, more or less, in the model of the other major cities.[82] In most of these towns the economic base was not always the same with the metropolises. Almost all the towns in north Bengal were dependent on the prosperity of Gaur-Pandua. Tanda and Devkote were used as capitals; the former had a mint and the latter a fort. Devkote was an important urban centre from the time of Bakhtiyar Khalji. We notice another set of urban centres which were 'in betweens' of villages and towns-more towards big village than town; their physical constituents being - pastures, temples, large ponds, paths, hattas/hat, orchards, and bathing ghats used for social interaction and other exchanges. This difference comes out clearly if the physical features and social composition of Nabadwip are compared to those of Gaur - Pandua. This type of small towns are evident along the banks of the Bhagirathi: Santipur, Triveni, Panihati, Khardaha, Katwa, Srikhanda etc., where the followers of Nityananda, Birbhadra, Uddharan Dutta, Narahari Sarkar, and many others, succeeded in preaching reformed Vaishnavism with the help of and among the traders in this area. Despite having a rich hinterland in Satgaon area zamindars and other landed groups are almost absent in Vaishnava biographical literature. It is most likely that the economic base for this type of urban centres was provided by internal trade surplus. Traders of Nabadwip were consumers of commodities from Varanasi, Orissa, Tibet, Kashmir, etc., possibly the merchandise came by waterways and passed on to Nabadwip. But no organised distribution centre in Nabadwip is evident in the sources; commodities were meagre in number, meant for individual consumption of the rich. Santipur also was an old town. Both Nabadwip and Santipur were inhabitated by a dominant group mostly belonging to teaching profession. Long lists of foodstuff, the detailed description of which is readily available in biographies of Vaishnava leaders, point towards the presence of a fertile and agriculturally productive hinterland from where there was no dirth of supply to these towns. In the physical formation of these towns only the mansions of the rich had gates and boundary walls, no big markets, no rampart walls, no seraikhana or hamam were available. Thus it is

to be noted here that both physically and qualitatively they were different from the Indo-Saracenic cities which attracted much attention from foreign travellers and traders.[83] At the end of the 16th century, another type of small towns is evident in the marshy land of eastern Bengal; their economic and political control was different. From the Hooghly to the Meghna, the entire marshy, wetland region was called 'bhati' area by Muslim historians. This type of urban centres were regarded as 'deltic' towns. Their political control and economic base was the subject matter of the next phase of Bengal's history.[84]

One of the most vital areas in urbanisation is the dynamics of demographic change. Establishment and growth of urban centres meant growth of permanent settlements; it also indicates prevention of constant movement of people. Most important factor in demographic change, since the 13th century, was the growth of Indian Muslim population. There is no reliable numerical data, such as in the Mughal period, available in the Sultanate period (in Bengal); an attempt could be made to determine the size of Muslim population approximately assessed from the size of mosques, idgahs, and hamams, and other public buildings, most of which are either in ruins or have not yet been excavated. The demographic change was first brought about by the influx of foreign Muslim population. But gradually with internal migration of local population and involuntary transfers from one area to the other, the population could not permanently remain divided between Indian and foreign.

Foundation of Muslim settlements (pockets in older settlements?) was a long and continuous process. Many tribes were integrated in various capacities, particularly in the army; they mostly turned into city-dwellers and gave impetus to active urban process. From the 13th century to the 14th century, by the most viable process of acculturation, there was a transformation of ethnic and religious composition of the Indian people. Emergence of Indian Muslims, whom Prof. Muhammad Habib regards as 'the intermediate link' between foreign emigrants and local Hindus was the most significant result of the new process which finally developed into a syncretic and integrated culture manifested in the various ways of life.[86] The

moving force behind the urban process is social mobility - there are two types of urban population movement: (i) territorial or spatial, and (ii) social. Regulated and controlled transformation and communication, and various types of occupational activities intensified physical mobility of the urban population, which meant movement of people not only from countryside to cities, but also intercities as well. There were various types of spatial movements: (i) change of habitation from one place to another; (ii) daily movement to and fro of the place of work; (iii) change from one city to another; (iv) movement of seasonal labourers, vegetable vendors, vagrants, jugglars, musicians and entertainers, etc., etc. Social mobility is generally of two types: vertical and horizontal. Horizontal mobility is indicated in the transition from one group to another, but on the same level. Vertical mobility is the transition from one social level to another. Both the features of social mobility were present in towns and cities of medieval India. Various types of social and economic relationships grew out of social interaction in the urban milieu, creating ample scope for social change in individual positions, as well as in group situations: rise and decline of the nobility, rise of some groups among common people to higher social and political status, etc., are all examples of vertical mobility related to rise and fall of individuals/groups to and from different social and economic level. This could be possible if urban society provided opportunity to merits and talents and or professional skill and competence of individuals and groups respectively.[87]

Upper class Muslim society consisting of Arabs, Abyssinians, Afghans, Turks, Mongols, etc., added to urban Muslim population. Conversion of Hindus to Islam generated a huge lot of artisan class consisting of working people engaged in various professions signifying the growth of internal market system which generated scope or craft production and growth of distribution centres. Growth of urban centres with nonagricultural base, became the refuge of working class and service people.[88] Mostly habitational patterns based on class/ caste status and consciousness signified class and racial composition of urban population. There was a concentration of unskilled labourers in cities; they generally lived in the peripheral zones. In the Muslim society theoretically there was no restriction on inter-professional

mobility in the urban population - slaves, artisans, craftsmen, weavers, and others belonging to the lower strata, sought upward movement in the social scale. Within the Muslim population a strong tendency towards status hierarchy is noticeable.[89] Urban life was very much dominated by slave labour; it became an inseparable part of respectable households; slaves were engaged even by Sufi mystics. Merchants were involved in slave trade; they were interested to invest in it slave trade because it was profitable. Often than not the Sultanate administration used slaves to juxtapose to tribal and clanish brotherhoods in the nobility.[90] But manual labour was always identified with slave labour and thus described socially. Enslaved people captured during military campaigns and war, trained later in skilled professions, lived in towns and cities. People driven out of rural habitation by natural disasters like famine, draught and flood, or for mere lack of sufficient means of subsistence, flocked in cities. They survived as beggars, pedlers, service people, domestic servants, etc. As untrained, unorganized manpower this fluid population could not serve the productive system effectively.[91]

It is difficult to analyse the demographic composition and social mobility in the urban settlements in medieval Bengal, largely due to the paucity of materials. In the Sena-Varman-Deva rule, due to various socio-economic factors, like a general decline in trade, merchants, craftsmen, and artisans lost social prestige, and brahman groups as land assignees and karana-kayasthas as bureaucrats became influential in the society. Only higher varna-groups had the right to enjoy social wealth. Landless and social labourers did not have the right to live within city-walls - chamar-chandal, nishad-pulinda, dom-dombini, shabar-shabari, yogi-kapalik of the Charyapadas lived in huts (kutir) outside the city-boundary.[92] Alberuni observed that washermen, cobblers, jugglers, weavers, fishermen and others were not allowed to live in cities.[93] It is difficult to determine how far egalitarian the urban society was under the Turkish rule. With the expansion of trade, stability in the urban economy and accelerated pace of urban process, various type of people gathered, particularly in commercial centres. There is evidence of huge increase in urban population recorded by foreign travellers. Also, expansion of suburbs of Gaur

and Pandua indicate population pressure on these cities. Generally city-gates were kept open to public during Turkish rule.

In the histories of Delhi chroniclers, in the letters and biographies of elite religious personalities, in the accounts of foreign travellers and traders, the picture of urban life is inadequate and partial, commoners are rarely mentioned. They came into contact with the ruling class and people belonging to the upper strata of the society. In their description, the royalty, the nobility, the bureaucracy, the military and elite sufi groups occupy a large place - and they were all city-dwellers. Ma Huan noticed the presence of nobles, guards and soldiers in the court, who again were only Muslim; but he also mentions that there were professional people and skilled craftsmen present in Pandua, the then capital. In the description of the royal banquet attended by Fei Tsin we get information about the lifestyle of the urban rich and the presence of local and foreign trading community.[94] From Verthema, Barbosa, Joao de Barros, and such others, presence of an international trading community in cities and ports are evident; Arabs and Persians were dominant elements among them. In Barbosa we get the description of high-level Muslim urban life - how they enjoyed affluence and spent their life in a state of 'extravagancy'. His observation about concentration of 'white' men in urban centres indicate large scale presence of foreigners in the society ('inhabitants of Bengala were white').[95] In the writings of Tome Pires and Duarte Barbosa at the beginning of the 16th century still Gaur was the premier city of Bengal; but among approximately forty thousand residents mostly lived in thatched houses.[96] According to Joao de Barros there were approximately two lakhs people lived in Gaur in early 16th century, compared to the population of Surat at the end of the 17th century.[97] Dr. Aniruddha Roy is of opinion that the number is a rough guess. From Ralph Fitch we come to know that Satgaon, then virtually in decline, was frequented by Arab merchants even as late as the last quarter of the 16th century.[97]

Demographic composition in cities and towns was more varied than what it was in rural areas. Concentration of people collected in cities with the object of associating themselves with trade, commerce and administration. In addition to the major metropolises, the existence

of which urban centres can be explained in terms of political and commercial reasons, there was a large number of smaller towns which sprang into existence for various purposes ; some of the towns with physical and other features have been discussed before. For instance, Ekdala was a fort-town; at the time of Firuz Shah Tughloq's Bengal invasion (1442) it was the capital of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, obviously for strategic reasons; it was then inhabitated by such groups as upper class militarymen, students, sufis, ascetics and foreigners. When capital was shifted from there to Pandua it was very likely that the population composition of Ekdala changed considerably. Theological classes generally concentrated in Hazrat Pandua and Hazrat Jalal Sonargaon. This particular group had least mobility of movement from one place to the other. In the description of Krittibas Ojha and Vrihaspati Mishra it is evident that Hindu bureaucrats and courtiers lived in the capital.[98] Vrindvandas describes Nabadwip graphically to show that it was an important centre for teaching professionals, scholars and students. Apart from the high caste learned people the swarnabaniks, shankhabaniks, gandhabaniks, tambuli, malakar goalas and tantubayas lived there.[99] Socially conscious poet Mukundaram observes that numerous converted Muslim groups such as Subali, Nehali, Pani, Kudani, etc. lived in town.[100]

The rich urban class of both communities certainly needed social labourers to enjoy the comforts and benefits of city-life. From Ibn Batuta (1346) it is evident that slavery was an integral part of urban life; upto the 15th century slavery was rampant among the rich. Barani refers to a big slave market in Delhi pointing towards relative cheapness of the price of slaves. Batuta gives description of buying, selling and prices of slaves in Bengal markets. Women-slaves, young and beautiful, were bought to be kept as concubines; even they did not fetch much money ('a beautiful young girl, fit to serve as a concubine, was sold in my presence for a gold dniar' ... )[101]. In vernacular literature there are numerous references to slaves, men and women, for domestic labour. Not much information is available for the most important aspect of how and from when artisans and craftsmen were being converted to Islam. From Mukundaram's list

of Muslim artisans it is obvious that by the end of the 16th century converted Muslim groups are very much present in towns. But if not chronologically, thematically the trend is always present in Bengal society - masons were Hindu, stonecutters Muslim, also weavers and tailors embraced Islam. Among other artisans and craftsmen goldsmith, silversmith, jewellers, engravers, dressmakers, zari-workers, associated with courtlife, formed a section of urban population, Ma Huan noticed (early 15th century) apart from varied types of textiles, silk handkerchiefs, caps embroidered with zari'/golden thread, paintware like cups and basins, steelguns, knives and scissors were available in the markets of Pandua. He makes a special mention of the use of smooth and glossy paper made from bark of tree; manufacturers of these commodities must have been town people. He also noted a class of entertainers - clowns, jugglers and 'shehnai' players, who entertained the urban rich; but it is quite likely that they were not permanent urban residents.[102] Textile, metalwork (blacksmiths) shipbuilding, masonary and stonecurving required a large labour force. Thus it is more than a possibility that craftsmen and manufacturers accepted conversion to get more employment and benefit of urban life.[103]

The population composition of middle order towns was markedly different from that of the big cities. By the early 16th century Nabadwip had emerged as a university town with people migrating there from as far as Sylhet. The town was a part of sarkar Satgaon, ruled by a Qazi with a sizeable Muslim population. It was a centre of textile manufacturing which explains the presence of Muslim artisans. The Bhagirathi had moved closer to Nabadwip in the east - composition of the people of Nabadwip would show that around the middle of the 16th century there were both educated middle class, physicians, teachers, small traders, and also lower class in service and production sectors- weavers, oil-pressers, gardeners, barbers, gold and iron-smiths, etc,. It is these middle and lower class people who opted later for Sri Chaitanya's Vaishnasvism. In his biographies there is no mention of Chaitanya's visit to villages or big cities. Sri Chaitanya's conversion of the producing and commercial classes scattered in the smaller towns along the Bhagirathi -- all these point towards greater

commercialisation of the ports of Bengal. Effort of Sri Chaitanya to literate the service groups, producers, as well as small traders, from domination of brahamanical authority led to the emergence of a new social order which could bring forward a different production relation. The new ideology tried to forge a greater harmony through the collective effort of the producer, artisan and small traders without religious discrimination and prohibition[104]. For the uplift of the artisan to a higher social status- service people- boatmen, tailor, sweatmeat producer- vendoring door to door, the occupational groups of low-caste settled outside the city. Salt-dealers(Mal) remained outside - for their association with chandals who worked with leather and they packed salt in leather bags. Domes supplied wood for cremation in burning ghat, also made strawhat for peasants. Middle class professional groups were treated with disdain- goldsmiths earned a lot by keeping as mortgage other people's ornaments, vaidyas and kavirajs flew away from seriously ailing patients, but in Alauddin Hussain Shah's time Hindu physicians were greatly honoured. Kayastha officials are depicted as extremely greedy in grabbing land. Jajmani system was prevalent.

Reasons for the decline and fall of the urban centres were many - natural, political and economic. According to Dr. Aniruddha Ray natural cause like silting of river-beds leading to the change of the course of rivers should not be over emphasised in the discussion of urban decay. Change of capital could have been one of the reasons of the decline of an urban centre; but capitals were not always shifted for water-problem caused by change of river course. In the middle of the 14th century capital was transferred from Gaur to Pandua, situated twenty miles west of the former, it has been argued that the reason being change of the course of river. It is difficult to assess how far the river was removed from Gaur at this time. Ibn Batuta came to Bengal in 1346 and observed an almost civil-war situation among the ruling groups. It is a possibility that for political reason, more than natural, the capital was shifted to Pandua. At the end of the 15th century Gaur again became the capital, both Gaur and Saptagram were dependent on the hinterland for their economic prosperity. With their decline the whole process of urbanisation was

hampered for the time being. Rise of Satgaon was closely related to the fall of Gaur ; just as rise of Hooghly was related to the decline of Satgaon. At the end of the 15th century political tranquility was disturbed by the constant confrontation between Bengal and her neighbours. From the first quarter of the 16th century Bengal-Afghan and Afghan-Mughal struggle brought about the fall of the Hussain Shahis; this political crisis led to the economic decline of the urban centres; the entry of the Portuguese in the economic and political scenario of Bengal further accelerated the process of decay. Due to constant political instability hinterland of the cities and ports were not safe any more, communication and supply routes were disturbed. Even in the time of the Hussain Shahis capital was transferred for strategic reasons. Dr. Aniruddha Ray thinks that in the early 16th century Satgaon was the major port of Bengal, although it was not an oceanic port, but that does not exclude the possibility of its being a good port. In the 15th century the Ganges, the Saraswati and the Yamuna were still vast and open rivers (muktaveni) according to Bipradas Pipilai. Even at the end of the 16th century Satgaon in Mukundaram is a prosperous urban centre and the major outlet of Gaur in the '30s of the 16th century; already the Saraswati was heavily silted and the political scenario changed dramatically to add to the decline of Satgaon and emergence of Hooghly as an outlet to the Bay of Bengal. Rest of the history of the decline of urban centres of pre-Mughal times falls into the next period. Silting of riverbeds and change of the course of rivers caused flood, lack of navigability, water crisis in daily life, unhygenic civic conditions, all of which contributed indirectly to urban decay.

Silting of the Saraswati is roughly assigned to the end of the 15th century by N.R.Ray and others. Emergence of the Bhagirathi as a major route from the mid-15th century led to Satgaon's appearance as an important trading centre. Silting of the Saraswati did not lead to the decline of Satgaon as the Portuguese used this port even in the early 17th century. A bridge was constructed by Alauddin Hussain Shah linking Satgaon with the holy city of the Hindus, Triveni. There is no mention of the Saraswati in the Mangal poems. The Chinese delegation coming to Pandua (early 15th century) landed at Chatgaon

which indicates that Satgaon had not been in operation at that time. Ibn Battuta praised Chatgaon as gateway to the populous interior city of Sonargaon. From the late 15th century the struggle between Bengal, Arakan and Tripura went on for control of Chatgaon linking Tripura and south-eastern hill -tracts. This unstable political condition led to the increasing use of the Bhagirathi route. While Sher Shah was knocking at the door, Mahmud Shah III(1532-1538) allowed the Portuguese to build forts at Chatgaon and Satgaon in lieu of military help, apart from allowing them earlier to build factories and custom houses in Bengal with land-revenue from nearby areas allotted to them. This was the beginning of Europeon settlements in Bengal which, however, did not save Mahmud III from being overthrown by Humayun.

# Conclusion

## Dynamics of An Evolving Society

The period between the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khalji and the fall of the independent Sultanate, a time span of almost three hundred and fifty years, is the long story of a society in transition evolving gradually towards the working of a new socio-cultural process. It is the obvious starting point and the most formative stage of Islamization of the polity and the society in the Delta. With the fall of the independent Sultanate, Bengal passed on, not only from the most formative stage, but also from one of its most creative periods of Islamization leading towards a dynamic composite society. In this period Bengal is found as a single eco-political unit, Bengali language gradually being transformed into the language of the people, one of the strongest cementing forces between the communities. Despite the presence of strong ethnic tendencies, difference of faith and many forms of social divisiveness, a kind of political and cultural homogeneity was achieved during this period..

The whole of the 13th century was spent on invasions and occupations, conflicts and confrontations amongst the old ruling class and the new Turkish conquerors. Gradually the old Hindu aristocracy was subverted, the later Sena rulers and their corrolaries could not

hold back and sustain anymore. But even in 13th century the Turkish muqtis and walis had to seek for military help from the old aristocracy in the time of their rebellions against the Delhi sultans. By the mid-14th century, when the Ilyas Shahis founded the first dynastic monarchy independent of Delhi, allegiance to local rulers had already grown strong among the Hindu landholders. Appointing Hindus in high posts in the revenue department became a general practice since then. To focus on the continuity, it is necessary to review the pre-Turkish characteristics of state formation and land system which the new rulers inherited from the previous period. Through vassalage and tributary system the old Hindu rural aristocracy still remained in charge of land and revenue collection. The theory of a trade and urbanization gap in the pre-1200 period has been questioned and reviewed in the modern researches. There are ample evidences to prove that there was a continuation of commercial activities coming down from the previous period. The level of urbanization was not the same throughout the Delta, but there were centres of commercial activities in many of the urban centres.

Bengal's contact with the Islamic world, especially in the fields of trade, proselytization and colonization began earlier than its military invasion and political occupation of territories in the 13th century. Unlike in northern India where Islam was mostly confined to urban centres, it spread widely in rural Bengal. In the rural areas around Delhi and Agra, main power centre of Turkish rule, Muslim population was not at large, because according to some scholars, there proselytization was stoutly opposed 'by powerful Hindu tribes like Jats and Rajputs intensely orthodox and controlled by a strong brahman hierarchy'. But at the same time in north Bihar, an old seat of brahmanical domination, Muslims were more numerous than around south Bihar. All these facts indicate that Islam as a religion spread in different regions by different means among people whose social and economic conditions varied widely, and from this particular aspect it needs a close scrutiny.

The process of Islamization of Bengal society was initiated at both urban and rural levels. Means and methods of Islamization and acceptance and rejection of the process largely depended on the

difference of life and conditions in these two levels of the society. Islam being essentially an urban culture, immigrant Muslim colonies in cities and towns composed of the ruling class, military captains, soldiers, traders, merchants artisans, craftsmen, the ulama, the sufi elites, etc. Means of expansion of Islam at this level were many : (i) by conquest and occupation ; (ii) by setting up the government (iii) contribution of rulers in promotion of Islamic spirit by founding Islamic institutions and practicing Islamic custom; (iv) propagation carried out by urban religious groups through educational, social welfare and religious activities; (v) comparative numerical inferiority of immigrant foreign Muslims in the midst of a huge non-believer population necessitated inter-marriage and concubrinage, which constantly led to amalgamation of foreign with indegenous elements in the Muslim population. At the urban level some caste Hindu groups responded positively to Turkish rule. Through land system and revenue collection they were integrated into Turkish polity.But lacking in equal political status in the Turkish state they accepted administrative posts in the government and remained important component in the society. Few of them took refuge in Islam, although many of them were culturally Islamized. The emergence of non-brahman groups like the kayasthas and the vaidyas in the administrative structure led finally to their turning into landed class. The influence and affluence of Hindu bureaucrats are evident in vernacular literature. From the time of the House of Raja Ganesh, and also under the Mahmud Shahis, brahmans too started accepting government positions and patronization from Sultans by receiving titles and other honours. Under the Hussain Shahis powerful brahman families held highest of administrative posts. Hindu civil servants and officers were influenced by Islamic social manners, dress, customs and language <Persian>[2]. Influence of Islamic social custom vis-a-vis the Turkish polity on the caste Hindu groups created upheaval in the orthodox society.Mechanism of self-defence was devised by orthodox Hindu groups, both in the brahman and kayastha folds, to protect the high caste society from further impact of Islam. Also, the rise of non-brahman groups and better status of artisans small traders, craftsmen, others considered to be shudras, in urban centres, made an impact on the caste society; so

the threat perception developed from both angles: Islamic influence as an onslaught of outside culture, and betterment of the status of some non-orthodox groups, threatening the caste structure, as an inner dynamics, within the society[3] . As a result, a kind of social mobility is evident in the upper strata of the Hindu society. Situation at the rural level was totally different, large number of low-castes and out-castes emabraced Islam for various reasons, i.e., to escape caste oppression, conversion for material improvement; aborigines of Deltaic and Eastern Bengal, mostly 'untouchables', hunters, fishermen responded to the preaching and persuasion of the sufi propagators, often than not, backed by varying degree of compulsion. With the penetration of sufi-warriors/ghazis deep down into the heart of Bengal, along with their followers-cum-soldiers, conversion with intermarriage went on and Muslim colonies were founded in villages. Innumerable unrecorded,unidentified mazars, still scattered through Bengal villages, stand witness to their presence in the rural society[4] There are examples of 'jihad' declared and destruction of temples and vihars in contemporary Persian and vernacular sources. It is difficult to assess the extension and frequency of occurence of these events from contemporary court chronicles where recorders boast of these acts as 'great and holy' achievements of their patron Sultans[5] Both the notion of jihad and the action of iconoclasm were used as political weapons in times of invasion and war.

In the late 15th century Gaudiya Vaishnavism was initiated as a socio-religious reform movement, principal purpose of which was to bring about a qualitative change in the decadent Hindu society. Populist character of the movement in the early phase was expressed through acceptance of simple principles and easy method of propagation. The leaders, at least ideally wanted to include all sections of people cutting across the barriers of caste and creed, including the low castes, out-castes, women, and other socially oppressed groups in their program of 'patitoddhar'/salvation of the fallen. Sri Chaitanya was born <February, 1486> in the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah, immediately after which political power was usurped by the Abyssinians for next six years <1487-1493> Turkish government and Muslim society was passing through a period of crisis. One of Sri Chaitanya's biographers,

Jayananda says that a strong rumour prevailed at the birth of Sri Chaitanya that there would be a brahman king in Gaur. As there had always been conflict between the brahmans and the Yavans through the ages, when the king (Jalaluddin Fatah Shah) came to know about the rumour, he ordered the destruction of Nabadwip, where Sri Chaitanya was born. Also the Muslims lving in Piralya, a village close to Nabadwip, evicted all brahmans there. Threatened by their oppression, Sarvabhouma, the son ofVisharad, fled to Orissa with his family, although his brother Vidyavachaspati stayed back in Gaur[6] Vrindavandas admits that at the birth of Sri Chaitanya, his maternal grandfather, Nilambar Chakravarti made the same prediction. The poet also says that Pandit Gadadhar Das <later Chaitanya's tutor> left Nabadwip in fear of oppression from theKing[7]. The story of the expected brahman king of Gaur/Nabadwip was inducted by the Vaishnav poets from the Krishna legends where the latter's birth aroused Kansa's anger provoking persecution. This style was adopted to prove Sri Chaitanya as an incarnation of Lord Krishna. The rumour of brahman king might have reached from Nabadwip to the court of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah through the local Muslim officers. But real opposition to the Vaishnav reformers came from the orthodox people who they termed as 'pashandis'; they were suspicious of the rising influence of the Vaishnavs and felt threatened that there anti-brahmanical ideas and activities would destroy the caste-structure and their caste superiority. They complained to the local gazi of Yavana Haridas's deviation from Islam and acceptance of Vaishnav faith, for which he had to face trial, punishment and imprisonment at the hands of the local Muslim authorities. Srivas Acharya, a pre-Chaitanya Vaishnav leader, used to sing devotional songs at night with his four brothers, for which the pashandis complained to the qazy. Even before Chaitanya, issue of kirtan was a constant source of conflict between the Vaishnavs and the local Muslim authorities[8] This was more frequent in the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah.

Gaudiya Vaishnav movement reached its peak in Bengal during Alauddin Hussain Shah's reign. Under Sri Chaitanya's leadership the decision to include out-castes, low-castes and women in the reform program and to spread the name of a single god by 'nagarsankirtan'

or public congregations, shook the very roots of brahman dominated caste-society. The pashandis lodged complaints against devotional singing in-public to the local Muslim officers, even against Sri Chaitanya himself, when they appealed to the qazi calling him thakur or master. In the Vaishnav biographical literature, which is full of references to these local conflicts, there is no evidence of involvement or participation of the Sultanate government; terms like mulukpati, adhikari, raja, thakur indicate local Muslim officers and not Sultans. It is clear from final compromise situation reached at in almost each case of conflict, that both the Vaishnav leaders and the qazis carefully avoided direct encounter involving the Gaur government. The incident of Kajidalan/Suppression of the Qazi, has acquired immense ideological significance in Gaudiya Vaishnav movement. Two most famous biographers of Sri Chaitanya react differently to the event - Vrindavandas describes it in meticulous detail, but Krishnadas Kaviraj mentions it briefly. Vrindavandas, starting from the title of his biography (Chaitanya Bhagvat) to every incident in Sri Chaitanya's life, passionately describes and devotedly explains from the angle of avatartattva/Chaitanya as incarnation of Krishna. Chaitanya himself spells out his role as the Destroyer of Evil-Force and Saviour of the Good[10]. Kajidalan should not simply be interpreted as a case of Hindu-Muslim communal conflict, finally won over by Hindus over a Muslim qazi. It has been presented by Vrindavandas with deeper religious significance, which explains Sri Chaitanya as incarnation of Lord Krishna playing exactly the same role as in the Bhagvat. On the other hand Krishnadas Kaviraj is more realistic in his approach to the event and generally concentrates on the philosophical aspect of Vaishnavism. The incident goes that the qazi of Nabadwip, at the request of the pashandis (orthodox group), banned devotional singing in public congregations, and Sri Chaitanya with a large number of followers violated the ban. His followers attacked the qazis' house and brought him to Sri Chaitanya's presence. The qazi apologized, had a long discourse with the Vaishnav leader and accepted defeat[11]. It is likely that the qazi was aware of Hussain Shah's tolerant policy to the Vaishnavs, on the other hand, the Vsishnavs did not push the conflict too far.

It is doubtful whether the mighty Sultan of Gaur and the charismatic Vaishnav leader met each other personally. It is said in the sources that at Ramkeli, a place quite close to Gaur, Sri Chaitanya and his followers carried on with 'kirtan', to which the Sultan, already informed of the savant's influence on large number of people, ordered his officers not to disturb him and let him practice his faith in peace[12]. Kavikarnapur says that Sri Chaitanya passed through the city of Gaur on his way to Mathura, when a very large number of people accompanied him in his journey[13]. Only Churamanidas (late 16th century) says that Hussain Shah personally visited Sri Chaitanya with his courtiers; this has not been corroborated by any other source[14]. There are speculations among modern scholars about the reasons of Sri Chaitanya's leaving Bengal permanently and settling in Puri in Orissa till his death in 1533: (i) Orissa was a Hindu kingdom and Bengal was a Muslim kingdom; (ii) Chaitanya's ancestors originated in Orissa; (iii) spread of Vaishnavism was difficult in Bengal due to stiff opposition from orthodox groups and local Muslim officers; not one of them specifically, but all these factors might have led to his settling in Orissa where he was welcomed by the Hindu royalty and received patronization from the aristocracy. From Nilachal he deputed Nityananda to spread Bhaktivad in Bengal, when the latter shifted the centre of his activities from orthodox brahman dominated Nabadwip to Khardah-Panihati area and concentrated on preaching among the traders in Saptagram. Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah (1519-1532) had a Jami-mosque built in Saptagram in 1530 AD, close to which lived Uddharan Dutta, a rich trader and disciple of Nityananda, in whose house long kirtan renditions were held completely undisturbed[15]. By that time initial period of conflicts with local Muslim authorities was over and Vaishnav congregations were accepted as regular practice. Compared to the regin of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah, the Hussain Shahi period was witness to peaceful co-existence with the Vaishnavs[16].

Attitude of Vaishnav leaders towards the common Muslims was generally positive. Saint Haridas was believed to be born in a Muslim family which has been proved by the prefix Yavana to his name. He yielded great influence (Haridas Mahimavarnanam) and secured high

position in the Vaishnav hierarchy. Sri Chaitanya requested his own mother to cook and serve food to Haridas who had been rejected and tortured by the Muslim officers at the complaint of the Hindu orthodox[17]. A Muslim tailor was beholden to Sri Chaitanya's charismatic personality. Bijuri Khan, a Pathan youth, was incuded in the Gaudiya movement by Chaitanya himself and he was called Pathan Vaishnav[18]. Once Sri Chaitanya was crossing the border between Bengal and Orissa, when a Hindu border officer warned him about a local Muslim administrator who was a drunkard and oppressor. But the administrator came to see him personally, unarmed, and helped Sri Chaitanya to cross the Mantreshwar by boat, the river often infested with pirates[19]. Sri Chaitanya once had a long discourse with a Muslim pir when he talked about his idea of monotheism in Islam; it is evident that he was well-exposed to its basic tenets[20]. When he directed Nityananda about who should be inducted to the Vaishnav faith, he carefully included yavanas with shudras, untouchables, the fallen and the women. Krishnadas Kaviraj very proudly declares that if the pashandis and yavanas listened to Chaitanya Bhavgat <by Vrindavandas> with devotion, even they would be transformed into great Vaishnavs. He makes an overstatement when he says that those Pathans who listened to the life-story of Sri Chaitanya, renounced their material life[21]. To prove Nityananda's influence on people, Vrindavandas says that even the Yavanas who were rebels against Lord Vishnu, took refuge at the feet of Nityananda[22]. These statements carry the overtone of co-existence and not of conflict.

There is no evidence in the sources to claim that the Turkish government directly opposed or resisted Gaudiya Vaishnav movement, which was a widely spread social reform movement of the time. Resistance held out by qazis and mullahs to brahmans and idolatory can not be termed as 'religious riots'. There was no directive from the Gaur government regarding local frictions. Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah was aware that his Hindu officers and ministers were staunch supporters of Vaishnav reformism. If the reform movement threatened the traditional structure of the Hindu society, it was not the problem of the Turkish government. It was not the concern of the Sultan if his Hindu officers joined the Vaishnav leaders, but if

they left the Sultani administration in large number that could have created problem for the government. It did not happen in reality; Rup and Sanatan were exceptipns and not the rule. Gaudiya reform movement was essentially a socio-religious movement and the leaders never aspired for political power. Both Alauddin Hussain Shah and Sri Chaitanya were unrivalled ruler and leader respectively in their own capacities, none of them crossed over to the other side of their respective spheres of influence. Compromise and not conflict was mututally beneficial for both the Turkish government and the Vaishnav leaders. If Jalaluddin Fatah Shah ordered eviction of brahmans and destruction of Nabadwip, Alauddin Hussain Shah ordered tax exemption for its people to make them 'happy and live in peace'[23].

Muslim religious groups were sharply divided on the basis of their social role at various levels of the society on which depended their interaction with the non-Muslim population. The attitude of the sufi elites with their urban and doctrinally orthodox orientation towards the non-Muslim population ranged from hostility to indifference. As they were often directly associated with the ruling class, they tried to influence Sultans in their attitude towards the non-Muslims. As early as in the Ilyas Shahi period orthodox sufis reacted against the policy of appointing Hindus in administrative posts. Shaykh Ala ul Haq Panduani warned Sultan Sikandar Shah (1358-1390) against appointment of Hindus, and when the Sultan did not listen to his advice, the Shaykh was openly annoyed[24]. Opinions and activities of Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi, Shaykh Jahangir Ashraf Simnani and Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam prove that they were against liberal policies of Sultans to non-believers. Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi's letter to Sultan Ghyasuddin Azam Shah (1390-1410) is quite revealing in this respect, in which he advices the Sultan not to recruit non-believers as trusted officers and administrators. He further explains, if any ruler justified acceptance of non-believers in important posts by saying that it was not done to make them friends, but for convenience only, this would lead to trouble and revolt. He also adds that they (non-believers) would not fail to corrupt (the Muslims) and would not hesitate to create trouble (for the rulers). Infidels should not be given executive posts (Wali) by which they could have control

over the Believers. Strong warning had been given in the Holy Books to those Muslims (rulers) who wanted to give right and authority to non-believers[25]. Orthodx sufi elites and the ulama reacted very sharply against the capture of political power by Raja Ganesh. The Sufi rebellion, led by Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam, was directed against the rule of an infidel by whom dar-ul Islam lapsed into dar-ul-Harb. Actual political challenge to Raja Ganesh came not from the Turkish nobility, but from the Sufis, whom he tried to suppress ruthlessly. In the three letters of Jahangir Ashraf Simnani to Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi of Jaunpur, Shaykh Hussain Dhokkarposh and Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam, he shows deep contempt and distrust for the non-believers[26].

'Conversion' and 'missionary', both the terms are used in relation to Sufis and expansion of Islam among non-Muslim population, in the 19th and 20th century context; but these are not applicable in the same sense in the context of Bengal in the period under study. Orthodox urban Sufis were not missionaries in the sense that they could not be directly involved in converting the rural masses to Islam. According to R.M. Eaton 'missionary' denotes a self-conscious propagator of faith, and 'conversion' a self-conscious change in religious conviction. But not all Sufis were self-conscious propagators, they were often more motivated as preachers to expand the power and influence of their own silsilas. Conversion in the sense of sudden and total change of religion by persuasion or by force, was not practical most of the times[27]. Hagiographical literature is largely silent about what the learned Sufis thought about conversion or how they wanted the religion to be spread. Shaykh Sharafuddin Yahya of Maner and Shaykh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi allowed the Hindu yogis and sadhus, who approached them in their khanqas and jama 'at-khanas, to think for themselves and advised their own followers to leave the things to their own volition. Some of them voluntarily embraced Islam, for example, a Hindu, eighty-one years old, came to Sharafuddin Yahya and willingly accepted Islam. The tolerant Shaykh did not believe in coercing anybody to change religion. He knew how difficult it was to convince the non-believers to deviate from their original path[28]. Not all Sufis contributed directly to the growth of Muslim society by conversion. The theory of contribution of Sufis in conversion of lower

order non-Muslims in rural areas provokes some pertinent questions : how did a complicated mystic tradition filter down to illiterate masses in an understandable and appealing form? Why low-caste rural poor were attracted to an abstract system like sufism? It is now obvious that the communication link at this social level was created not by mystical ideas, but in a far more comprehensible folk form, composed by Sufis, based on vernacular idioms, indegenous themes and local imagery for the propagation of a simple level of Sufi precepts. Folk literature and music were not the works of great Sufi savants, but of their descendants who had been indegenized, or of converted lay members who were simple rural folk. The stereotyped conception of medieval Indian Sufis as pious and quietistic mystics propagating the faith everywhere does not hold ground anymore[29].

The ulama, in their interpretation of Canon Law and other court duties, were not involved in proselytization. But qazis and mollahs at the local level, sharing same orthodox view point, came into contact with common folk of both communities. Qazis acted as local administrator and dispenser of justice along with other officials like 'mulukpati', adhikari, etc., They were quire powerful in small towns and villages; they even maintained private contingent troops. From the late 15th century, mullaism, an Islamic version of rural priesthood created by interaction with Hindus, became quite prevalent among the neo-converts. Poet Vijaygupta in his Manasamangal (1484-1485)gives a graphic description of the activities of local qazi and mullah. In the Hasan-Hosen episode the local qazi is an intolerant oppressor who tortures brahmans with the help of his brother-in-law Dula, and Taqai, a mullah, also assists them in these activities. It is a long episode centred around the apparent conflict between the devotees of Manasa, the snake-goddess, and the qazi and the mullah when they take out an armed contingent of Syyeds (Muslims) to punish the non-believers[30]. Vijaygupta wrote the book (1485-1486) in the reign of Sultan Jalaluddin Fatah Shah (1481-1486). By the end of the 15th century there was a large number of converted Muslim population present in the rural society. Aforesaid qazis and mullahs were also converted Muslims; they inevitably tried to prove their commitment to Islam by opposing the idolators. These qazis and

mullahs used to act on their own and there is hardly any reason to believe that there was any government support behind their aggression against non-believers.

Faqirs, derivishes, auliyas, pirs were the real propagators of Islam among the rural masses. Sufism, not as a complicated mystical system, but in the form of folk Islam, played the intermediary role of keeping the Islamic identity, at the same time spreading it to non-Muslim rural folks in a simple and direct form. It was made accessible to all through a few agencies like (i) simple and direct initiation ceremony; (ii) dargah worship and (iii) transcribing the main tenets into vernacular. Generally lay persons were induced to initiation into a Sufi's spiritual following (khanqa stage); three circles of followers were created by this : (i) inner circle of murids to follow spiritual disciplines under a pir in khanqah; (ii) a smaller circle of khalifahs/successors with the duty to initiate more people from the laity; (iii) thus creating a large number of devotees from the laity for worship of dargahs of venerated pirs and attending regular prayers, feasts and fairs. While the first two circles were higher status Sufi groups, the mass following belonged to the lower stratum of the society. With the passage of tariqa stage to taifa, the rural preachers played an increasingly significant role in spreading Islam in folk form. Conversion of Islam was usually done through the ceremony of reciting kalima, but it was not an efficient mechanism to convert large number of people. Most effective instrument for conversion was dargah, where large number of Hindus and Muslims, men and women from all walks of life, congregated on the basis of popular devotionalism. They performed simple rituals, acceptable to both communities, like lighting candles, offering gifts and flowers, and participating in fairs and festivals, specially urs[31]. The votive aspect of dargah was very much in keeping with indegenous Hindu and Buddhist traditions which made it a mediator between Islam and local faiths. In this respect there was no theological and social barrier separating Hindus and Muslim at rural level. There grew a syncretic religious life in rural Bengal, what R.M. Eaton calls 'India's folk Islam in the most dynamic form'[32]. Worship of mazars of faqirs and dervishes which is called 'Pirer moqam' in every village in Bengal is an offshoot of dargah worship.

Hindu/Muslim combined way of life was most dependent on the basis of a rich vernacular through which both the traditions became a common heritage.

Literature in our period of study is a store house of informations on social history; four main genres are useful : (i) Mangal Kavyas, (ii) Vaishnav biographies (iii) folklores and ballads and (iv) writings on Islamic subjects. Both Mangal Kavyas and Vaishnav biographies are religious in nature, the main difference being the former were meant to preach glory of folk gods and goddesses, and the latter to propagate Krishna cult through the lives of Vaishnav saints. As learning was generally a monopoly of upper castes, almost all the authors of those two types belonged to high castes and their caste outlook was mostly reflected in their writings. For instance, their attitude towards monarchy shows that they had respect to the idea of kingship cutting across the lines of religious difference. At the same time a common pattern or a literary stereotype is noticeable in both the Mangal Kavyas and Vaishnav biographies where necessity of an opposition force (in this case the Muslims) was strongly felt. This opposition force created obstacles to the worship of gods and goddesses or in the preaching of Krishna cult through devotional singing by Vaishnav leaders. This stereotype is expressed in two ways : (i) the idea of good force juxtaposed to the idea of evil force; (ii) superiority/victory of one religion over the other and the final acceptance of the 'superior' religion by the 'inferior' one.

The trend of opposition force and superior religion was first introduced in Vijaygupta's Padmapuran (1485-'86) written at the end of the reign of Jalaluddin Fatah Shah (1481-1486) which later turned into a literary stereotype followed by later Mangal poets till Bharat Chandra (18th century). It is significant that only local qazis and mollahs have been chosen as opposition force. In the Hasan-Hosen pala/episode the qazi of Hosenbati (neighbourhood) is an intolerant oppressor of Hindus, even more aggressive is his brother-in-law, Dula, who tears the holy thread of brahmans and spits on their faces. In the same village, Taqai, a mollah, finds the cowherds worshipping goddess Manasa and forcibly breaks the earthen pitcher (symbol of the goddess). At this he is beaten up by the cowherds and is forced

to apologize for his act. Afterwards the angry mollah informs the local qazi about his humiliation when the latter orders his armed followers (Syyeds) to punish the cowherds. But finally the qazi realised the greatness of Manasa, shaves his beard and worships her[32]. With little variations this episode has been used as a standard stereotype by the Mangal poets. Bipradas Piplai (1495-'96) in Alauddin Hussain Shah's time (1493-1519) used the episode in slightly different way : at the refusal of the qazi to worship her, by the order of the snake-goddess all his relatives die of snake bite, the qazi surrenders to Manasa and worships her. Narayandev (late 16th century)depicted the qazi as a cruel neighbour who indulges in theft and resists the cowherds from Manasa worship; but finally he himself worships the goddess[34]. Dwija Vamsibadandas's (16th century) qazi (Hasanhosen) is an oppresser, shows disrespect to Manasa, dies of snakebite, is brought back to life by the goddess and worships her finally[35]. Ketakadas Kshemananda (17th century) names the episode differently, as Rakhalpuja/worship by cowherds. Power of both Manasa and Sitala (goddess of smallpox) is proved over Ekabar (Akbar) qazi, who is struck with small-pox, leaves pir-worship and performs Sitalapuja[36]. Bharat Chandra Roygunakar (18th century) makes Emperor Jahangir to worship devi Annapoorna along with his followers, hajis and kajis[37], etc.

In Vaishnav biographical literature the stereotype is first noticed in Vrindavandas's Chaitanya Bhagvat in the episode of Haridasa Mahimavarnanam, where Yavana Haridas tortured by the Muslim mulukpati and qazi for deviation from Islam by taking the name of Lord Krishna; the saint shows miracle and the mulukpati apologizes. The major event of Kajidalan has been discussed before. Vrindavandas frequently mentions of conflict between qazis and Vaishnav leaders where finally a comprise is reached at and the qazi concerned either apologizes or/and accepts the name of Lord Krishna[38]. Jayananda (1560) is probably the only poet whose opposition force is Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah himself as 'the destroyer of Nabadwip', but finally even the Sultan surrenders[39]. The learned poet Krishnadas Kaviraj (1581) was more concerned with the ideological aspect of Vaishnavism- in the discourse between Sri

Chaitanya and a Muslim pir and Sri Chaitanya and the qazi, the superiority of Vaishnav thought over Islam is proved by the savant[40]. Here the stereotype is used in a more subtle way with academic approach.

In the writings of poets and writers often Muslims are mentioned in a detrimental sense and termed as yavana/foreigner, mlechha/ violator of diet rules, barbar/uncivilized, durachari/violator of social customs, neecho/mean and petty, nere/shavedhead, etc.[41]. Mukundaram is full of contradictions - at one hand he shows respect to syeds, shaykhs, ghazis, qazis, pirs and paighambars, on the other he shows great contempt to the alleged irreligiosity, dirtiness, greed and violence of the Muslims. According to him all cow-slaughterers are great sinners and all of them would go to hell[42]. Ketakadas Kshemananda calls a pir dagabaj/hypocrete. Vrindavandas and Krishnadas Kaviraj refer to Muslims as mlechha, yavana, go-brahmandrohi/opposer of holy cows and brahmans, Vishnudrohi/rebels against Lord Vishnu, etc,[43]. Local qazis and mollahs are repeatedly predicted as oppressors and opposition force. But final repentance, apology, redemption and acceptance of the superiority of gods and goddesses or Vaishnav saints show that the relationship was not as bad as it apparently appears in the vernacular literature. There are other redeeming features too: in Kshemananda's Manasamangal the qazi orders a temple with hundred columns to be built in honour of the snake-goddess[44]. Despite the Muslims being posed as the main opposition force, inner conflict in the Hindu society becomes apparent when we see the pashandis (Tantricized orthodox groups) frequently lodging complaints against Vaishnavs with the Muslim officers[45]. The treatment of the Saddharmis/Buddhists at the hands of the Vaishnav leaders, also points towards the problematic relationship between groups other than the Muslims[46].

It has already been noticed that with the indegenization of the Sultanate polity the character of Turkish rule changed. In the early phase, in place of Delhi dependent Turkish walis, dynasties dependent on local loyalists came to rule. With these political changes, attitude of subjects, irrespective of communities, also changed towards a better acceptance of the Turkish rule. Allegiance and loyalty of the

people to the local rulers is evident from the positive reaction of the Hindu educated class to the Turkish Sultans. Irrespective of Hindu or Muslim ruler kingship was not only an accepted but a respected idea in the Hindu educated class. The poets, on the one hand, refer to Turkish Sultans as 'kal yavanraja'/the terrible Muslim king, 'maha teebra narapati'/mighty aggressive king, 'yavanraj paramdurbar'/ invincible yavana king, etc., on the other hand, they speak of the Sultans in eulogistic terms[47]. This was partly an accepted literary norm, partly respect shown to monarchs and monarchy. Vijaygupta, who thundered on the local qazi and molla in his Hasan-Hosen pala, praises the Sultan as king of kings, the Rising Sun and compares his military might with that of Arjun, the mythological hero[48]. Kavindra Parameshwar praises Hussain Shah as a great man, an able warrior, an incarnation of Lord Krishna in Kaliyug[49]. Madhav Acharya, a famous Pundit of Nabadwip, in his commentary on Bhababhuti's drama, Malati Madhav, refers to Hussain Shah as King of kings[50]. Yasoraj Khan compares the Sultan with Purandar (Indra, the king of Paradise) and says he was gem of the world[51]. Shankar Kinkar Mishra, in Gourimangal, compares Hussain Shah with Ram born in Kaliyug[52]. In Krishnadas Kaviraj's Chaitanya Charitamrita Sanatan shows respect to Hussain Shah by calling him Lord of men and part of Vishnu[53]. Srikar Nandi, in the introduction of his Mahabharat, says that Nusrat Shah, the great king, ruled like a father (tata) on his subjects as Ram had done in the olden days[54]. Thus we see that in the homage of the poets to the rulers, religion was no bar, rulers like Barbak Shah, Fatah Shah, Hussain Shah, Nusrat Shah made positive impact on these people. Only expectation of patronage or fear of the government coercion could not have aroused such spontaneous appreciation, it needed the acceptance of the idea of benevolence of the rulers.

By the 16th century a large number of converted Muslims were present in the Bengal society, who despite their change of faith, shared the same past, experienced the same environment and spoke the same language with their non-believer brethrens. The stage of conflict in the rural areas reflected in the Ghazi Traditions was over; atmosphere of difference and disputes depicted in the early Mangal Kavyas and

Vaishnav biographies did not hold ground any more. The most vital role in social harmony between the two communities was played by Bengali language. Converted Muslims in the lower stratum of the rural society were not exposed to Islamic languages like Arabic and Persian. They failed to have any association with Islamic history and tradition, myths and legends, customs and usage, literature and law. They did not come into contact with the learned, urban theologians and sufi elites who could teach and influence their practice of Islam in day to day life.Although the language of the ruling class and the medium of official transactions remained Persian, Arabic script was never imposed on the people. Due to all these factors acceptance of Islam as religion and assimilation of culture was incomplete in the converted Muslim society.

As the neo-converts lacked the exposure to Islamic cultural heritage, they enjoyed Hindu legends and mythology, and also folk ballads in Bengali as a common heritage of all. Vrindavandas says that while listening to the tragedy of Ram at the loss of Sita, even the yavanas could not resist tears; they listened to the glory of Ram with great bhakti[55]. Paragal Khan and Chhuti Khan, the governors of Chatgaon area under Hussain Shah, ordered Kavindra Parameshwar to translate the Mahabharat which the poet did in obedience to his patrons[56]. Poet Srikar Nandi says that Chhuti Khan used to listen to Mahabharat with great interest[57]. With the grand success of Gaudiya Vaishnav movement, principles of which were spread in vernacular, Bengali language and literature got a new lease of life and vigour. This was revealing to educated Bengali Muslims, who could realise the potentiality and necessity of preaching Islam in vernacular for the rural masses. But for a long time holy books of Islam could not be translated into non-Islamic languages for fear of pollution and impurity. Also, this could have loosen the grip of learned Muslim orthodox groups on the special knowledge of Islam over which they had a monopoly.

From the late 16th century, with the emergence of converted Muslim educated class, the necessity to carry the message of Islam in vernacular to reach the masses was realised. A literary movement was started by Syyed Sultan who wrote Nabivamsha to educate the

people ignorant of the holy books in original. The poet was fully aware of the crisis of Islamic culture in a small converted society. He laments that forgetting Khuda and Rasul, the Muslims, along with the Hindus, read the stories of the Puranas in every home. He says that the Muslims born in Bengal failed to understand Arabic and without having any understanding of their own religion, they had animal existence[58]. From this time onward the cultural consciousness of Muslim educated class was derived from Islamic subjects, although it took a long time for the growth of Islamic tradition in a local language spoken in a converted society.

From the 17th century the same old literary stereotype was followed by the Muslim writers, for them there was no symbol of the ruling class as the opposition or evil force, as the rulers were Muslim themselves. They picked up the most vital ideological difference with the Hindus - idolatory as an opposition force. Syyed Sultan categorically declares that according to the holy books of Islam, those who even think of idols, would certainly go to hell. He explains the origin of the kafers and prepares a hierarchy of the believers which is very intricately balanced : those who did not salute the Noor/Light = 'Allah, they were born kafers; those who did not salute at first, but later did, were converted Muslims from Hindu families, and those who first showed respect to 'Allah, but later refused, were born Muslims turned kafers[59]. Poet Gharibullah (18th century) in Sonabhan has very ably proved the superiority of Islam over idolatory, and superior strength of an Arab hero, Hanifa, over Sonabhan, a brave Bengali girl, but unfortunately an infidel. It is highly significant the way he describes the encounter between 'Ali, the Prophets son-in-law and Kali the Hindu goddess, where the former won over Shiva, the Hindu god, and Kali hiding in a jungle in fear of the victorious Arab hero[60]. Faqir Gharibullah's audience was local converted Muslims and Hindus who were mostly ignorant rural folk; he does not even make any effort to preach the basic tenets of Islam, but explains its superiority over idolatory through the narrative to make it convincing to his audience.

Conscious effort to project the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity is very much present in Bengali literature of the 17th century, particularly

in the folk ballads of East Bengal. Poet Dwija (brahman) Kanai, in Mohua episode, praises the holy places of Islam like Makka and Madinan on the west and salutes the 'momen' with their prophets and holy books[61]. The poet of Malua episode says that the Hindus and the Muslims are made of the same material - only one says 'Allah and the other Hari; in reality, Bismillah and Vishnu are the same, the difference is just in name - Ram and Rahiman[62]. Ketakadas Kshemananda starts his Manasamangal with invocation to Pirs, Ghazis and Auliyas and salutation to the holy city of Pandua[63]. Rupram starts his Dharmamangal with a Vandana/invocation to all the Pirs and Paighambars of Islam[64].Manikram Ganguli expresses same kind of reverence towards Satyapir and other pirs[65]. Despite his regret and sorrow at the ignorance about Islam among the common folk, Syyed Sultan includes Brahma, Vishnu and others in his long list of Prophets from Adam to Hazrat Muhammad[66]. Poet Shaykh Chand in his Hara-Gouri Samvad, a Sufi mystic work, invokes Hindu gods in the same breath with Allah the Almighty[67]. Syyed Akbar equates Hindu gods with Prophets of Islam, even more than that, when he declares Sri Chaitanya and Hazrat Mahammad as two good friends[68].

In the later Mangal Kavyas(from 17th century) Hindu trading community interacted positively with Muslim traders and people associated with commercial activities. Brahman pundits invited by a trader to lead prayer for a male child, consulted the holy'Quran to find a solution and advised the trader to take the name of 'Allah when he set out to sea[68]. Ketakadas Kshemananda describes how his hero Chand Saudagar kept a copy of the Quran, with other talismans, for the protection of his son Lakshmindar from the wrath of Manasa, in an iron-clad bed-chamber[70]. Both Hindus and Muslims were apointed malim/mu'allim/crew in the same boats and they visited many mu'allim cities together[71]. Chand saudagar invited nine-hundred Muslim qawals/singers at the wedding of his son and sent betel-leaves and nuts to the qazi of Hosenbati requesting him to join the function[71]. In Raimangal, by Krishnaram, Hindu traders and their crew paid respect to Baro Khan ghazi and Muslim seafarers were devoted to Baba Dakshin Rai[72]. Innumerable poems (943 songs by 162 poets) with Vaishnav themes written by Muslim poets bear an eloquent

testimony to the continuance of a great tradition of syncretism leading towards a composite society with a shared legacy[73].

Islam as practised at the subaltern level of Bengal society was basically non-political and non-militant in nature; it was of a populist variety and assimilative of local customs and practices. Folk Islam was far away from the orthodox pristine and pure Islam practised and propagated by urban religious groups in an institutionalized and rigidly structured form. Rural pirs, dervishes, sufis, faqirs improvised folk religion imparted through a common vernacular which was easily acceptable and practised by the neo-converts who were in majority in the Muslim society at the rural level. Syncretic folk-cults like Pirism - Satyapir, Manikpir etc., and Ghazi sahib, Kadamrasul, Mushkilasan, etc., were created by a long process of acculturation. All these symbols and cults were easily acceptable to the non-Muslim segment of the rural society, who, in their turn offered almost the same variety of syncretic cults assimilating various elements from Sufi ideas and other Islamic symbols and concepts.

Rural religious cults were more successful in bringing about communal harmony in the society than official religious movements like Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Gaudiya Bhaktivad started with broadbased principles encompassing all social sections. But largely it was small town based, essentially supported by traders, artisans, bureaucrats, etc., for whom syncretism was not so vital. Later the movement, as it spread far and wide, was inevitably divided into two lines : theological groups founded by the orthodox and learned Goswamis of Vrindaban, who wrote famous treatises in Sanskrit, and the Vaishnav Sahajiya faith amalgamated with old Buddhist tradition of Sahajjan, preached in Bengali. Also in Dharmacult, Nathpantha and Sahajiya lowest of the lowly were accepted, their faith being based on simple, non-ritualistic, egalitarian guru-dependent systems. We notice the growth of different syncretic cults from the 18th century like Sahebdhani, Kartabhaja, Balaramshahi, Khusibiswasi, Lalanshahi and many other 'aul-baul' groups. They were opposed to caste-oppression, imposition of the learned and ritualism of priestly class; they at the same time were beshara/anti-Shariat and went against qazis and mollahs, e.g., any structured and institutionalized religion. These minor sects were

initiated and joined by people who often rose from the most common section of the society and preached their simple faith among the rural masses through the medium of songs composed and sung in dialects. The Baul sect is probably the culminating point of Hindu-Muslim syntheses, characterized by most unconventional customs and manners. Their songs were composed by inarticulate mystics of both communities : influence of Sufi thought is reflected in the idea of the Lover and the Beloved, Vaishnav impact of Radha-Krishna cult are also felt in the songs. These sects represented in a way the continuity of the process of an admixture of elements both from 'Islam' and 'Hindu' faiths percolated into the lowest order of the two communities at rural level creating a legacy of syncretism and coexistence.

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# Appendices

## I - List of Bengal Rulers

### The Khalji Amirate : 1200 AD - 1227 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji | 1204 - 1206 |
| Ali Mardan / Alauddin Khalji | 1206 - 1207 |
| Izzuddin Muhammad Shiran Khalji | 1207 - 1208 |
| Husamuddin 'Iwaz Khalji' | 1208 - 1210 |
| Alauddin Ali Mardan Khalji | 1210 - 1213 |
| Ghyasuddin (Husamuddin) 'Iwaz Khalji | 1213 - 1227 |

### The Turkish Rule : 1227 AD - 1283 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Nasiruddin Mahmud ( son of Iltutmish) | 1227 - 1229 |
| Ikhtiyaruddin Balka Khalji | 1229 - 1230 |
| Alauddin Jani | 1230 - 1231 |
| Saifuddin Aibak | 1231 -1236 |
| Izzuddin Tughral Tughan Khan | 1236 - 1245 |
| Qamruddin Tamar Khan Qiran | 1245 - 1247 |
| Jalaluddin Masud Shah Jani | 1247 - 1251 |
| Ikhtiyaruddin Tughan Khan Uzbeg | 1251 - 1257 |
| Jalaluddin Masud Shah Jani | 1257 - 1258 |
| Izzuddin Balban Uzbeg | 1258 - 1259 |
| Tajuddin Arslan Khan | 1259 -1265 |
| Tartar Khan | 1265 - 1268 |
| Sher Khan | 1268 - 1272 |
| Amir Khan | 1272 - 1278 |
| Mughisuddin Tughril | 1278 - 1283 |

## The House of Balban : 1283 AD - 1328 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Nasiruddin Bughra Khan (Governor) | 1283 - 1287 |
| Nasiruddin Bughra Shah (Sultan) | 1287 - 1291 |
| Ruknuddin Kaikaus | 1291 - 1301 |
| Joint rulers with Shamsuddin Firuz Shah :<br>Shamsuddin Firuz Shah | 1301 -1322 |
| Jalaluddin Mahmud Shah (N. Bengal) | 1307 - 1309 |
| Ghyasuddin Bahadur Shah (E. Bengal) | 1310 - 1322 |
| Shidabuddin Bughra Shah (W. Bengal) | 1317 - 1318 |
| Ghyasuddin Bahadur Shah | 1322 - 1324 |
| Nasiruddin Ibrahim Shah | 1324 - 1327 |
| Ghyasuddin Bahadur Shah | 1327 -1328 |

## Bengal Under the Tughloqs : 1328 AD - 1342 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Bahram Tartar Khan (E. Bengal) | 1328 - 1338 |
| Qadir Khan (N. Bengal) | 1328 - 1339 |
| Izzuddin Azam ul Mulk (S. Bengal) | 1328 - 1339 |

## Declaration of independence :

| | |
|---|---|
| Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah (Sonargaon) | 1338 - 1349 |
| Ikhtiyaruddin Ghazi Shah (Sonargaon) | 1349 - 1352 |
| Alauddin Ali Shah (Lakhnauti) | 1341 - 1342 |

## Independent Sultanate

## The House of Ilyas Shah 1342 AD - 1414 AD.

| | |
|---|---|
| Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah | 1342 - 1358 |
| Sikandar Shah | 1358 - 1391 |
| Ghyasuddin Azam Shah | 1391 - 1410 |
| Saifuddin Humza Shah | 1410 - 1412 |
| Shihabuddin Byazid (Slave of Ilyas Shah) | 1412 - 1414 |
| Alauddin Firuz Shah | 1414 |

## House of Raja Ganesh : 1414 AD - 1436 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Raja Ganesh / Danujmardan | 1415/17 - 1418 |
| Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah | 1415-16 / 1418 -1433 |
| Mahendradev | 1418 |
| Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah | 1433 - 1436 |

## Later Ilyas Shahi / Mahmud Shahi Dynasty : 1436 AD - 1486 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah | 1436 -1459 |
| Ruknuddin Barbak Shah | 1459 - 1474 |
| Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah | 1474 - 1480 |
| Sikandar Shah | 1474 - 1481 |
| Jalaluddin Fatah Shah | 1481 - 1486 |

## Abyssinian Rule : 1486 AD - 1493 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Barbak / Sultan Shahzadah | 1487 |
| Saifuddin Firuz Shah | 1487 - 1490 |
| Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah II | 1490 - 1491 |
| Shamusuddin Muzaffar Shah | 1491 - 1493 |

## The House of Hussain Shah : 1493 AD - 1538 AD

| | |
|---|---|
| Alauddin Hussain Shah -1493-1519 | 1493 - 1519 |
| Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah - 1519-1532 | 1519 - 1532 |
| Alauddin Firuz Shah - 1532-1533 | 1532 - 1533 |
| Ghyasuddin Mahmud Shah - 1533-1538 | 1533 - 1538 |

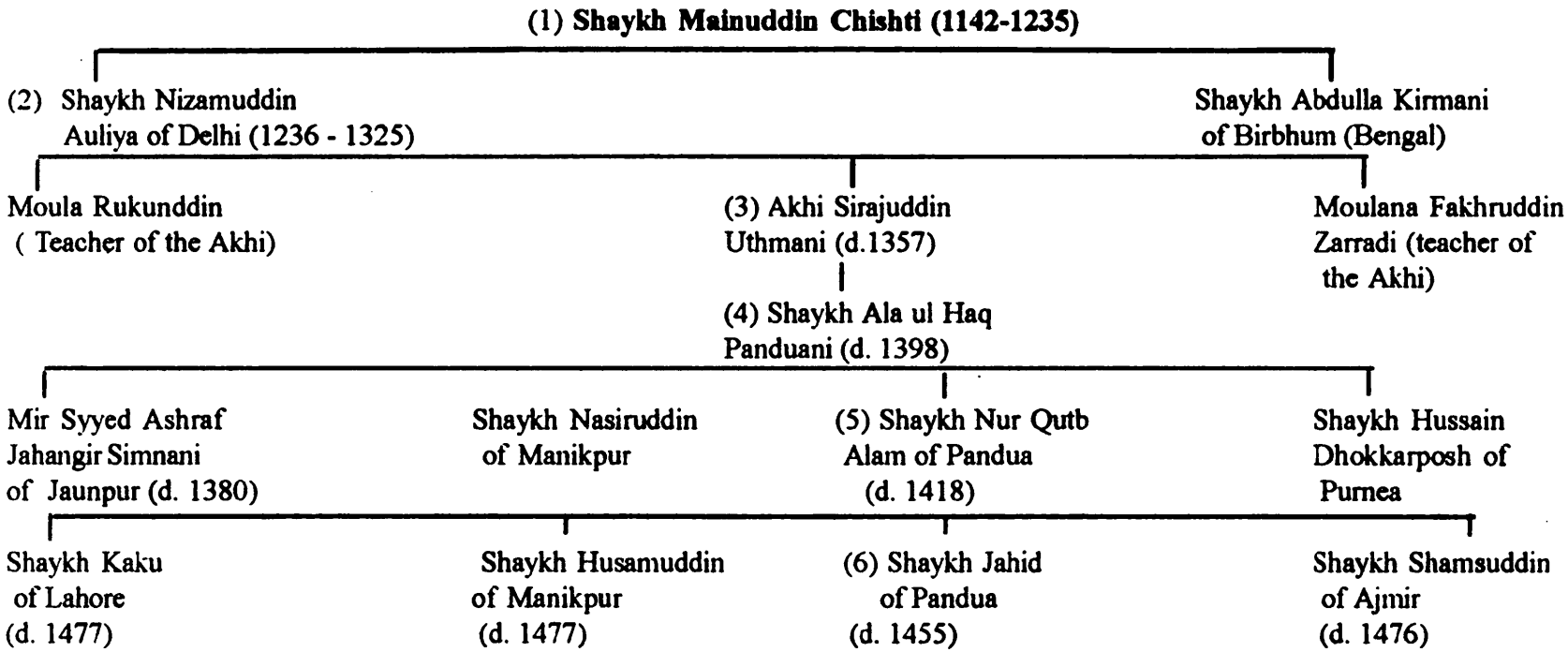
## II – The Sufis and the Sultans

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrizi - Pandua and Deotala (d. 1244 ?) | (a) Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish of Delhi | 1210 -1236 |
| | (b) IzzuddinTughril Tughan Khan in Bengal | 1233 - 1244 |
| 2. Shaykh Sharfuddin Abu Tawamah Sonargaon | (a) Ghyasuddin Balban of Delh | 1265 - 1287 |
| | (b) Mughisuddin Tughril of Bengal | 1278 -1283 |
| 3.Shaykh Sharfuddin Yahya -Sonargaon & Moner (Bihar) | (a) Firuz Shah Tughloq of Delhi | 1351 - 1388 |
| | (b) Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah of Bengal | 1339 - 1358 |
| | (c) Sikandar Shah of Bengal | 1358 - 1391 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Shaykh Sirajuddin Uthmani Lakhnauti (d. 1357) | (a) Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah of Bengal<br>(b) Firuz Shah Tughloq of Delhi | 1339 - 1358<br>1351 - 1388 |
| 5. Shaykh ala ul Haq - Pandua - Sonargaon (d. 1398) | (a) Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah of Bengal<br>(b) Sikandar Shah of Bengal | 1339 - 1358<br>1358 - 1391 |
| 6. Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam Pandua d.1418 - 19 (?) | (a) Ghyasuddin Azam Shah of Bengal<br>(b) Raja Ganesh of Bengal<br>(c) Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah of Bengal<br>(d) Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi Jaunpur / Invasion of Bengal | 1391 - 1410<br>1410 -15 / 1416 - 18<br>1416 / 1418<br>1418 - 1431<br>1415 |
| 7. Mir Syyed Ashraf Jahangir Simnani Jaunpur | (a) Raja Ganesh of Bengal<br>(b) Ibrahim Sharqi of Jaunpur | 1410 -15 / 1416-18<br>Bengal invasion- 1415 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8. Shaykh Hussain Dhokkarposh Pandua & Purnea (Tirhut) (d.? ) | (a) Raja Ganesh of Bengal<br>(b) Ibrahim Sharqi of Jaunpur<br>(c) Raja Sheo Singh of Tirhut | 1410 - 15 / 1416 - 18<br>1415 Bengal Invasion<br>1415 -16 Revolt |
| 9. Shaykh Muzaffar Shams Balkhi - Bihar (d.?) | (a) Ghiasuddin Azam Shah of Bengal | 1391 - 1410 |
| 10. Shaykh Badr ul Islam - Pandua (d. 1415 / '16) - Shahid | (a) Raja Ganesh of Bengal | 1415 - 18 |
| 11. Shaykh Anwar Shahid - 1416 / 17, Pandua | (a) Raja Ganesh of Bengal<br>(b) Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah | 1410 - 15/ '16' -18<br>1418 - 1431 |
| 12. Shaykh Husamuddin Manikpuri, Pandua Manikpur (Avadh) (d. 1449 or 1477 ?) | (a) Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I<br>(b) Ruknuddin Barbak Shah<br>(c) Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah | 1442 - 1459<br>1459 - 1474<br>1474 - 1481 |

## III - (i) Spritual lineage of Makhdum Shah Nur Qutb Alam


(1) Shaykh Mainuddin Chishti (1142-1235)
(2) Shaykh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi (1236 - 1325)
Shaykh Abdulla Kirmani of Birbhum (Bengal)
Moula Rukunddin ( Teacher of the Akhi)
(3) Akhi Sirajuddin Uthmani (d.1357)
Moulana Fakhruddin Zarradi (teacher of the Akhi)
(4) Shaykh Ala ul Haq Panduani (d. 1398)
Mir Syyed Ashraf Jahangir Simnani of Jaunpur (d. 1380)
Shaykh Nasiruddin of Manikpur
(5) Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam of Pandua (d. 1418)
Shaykh Hussain Dhokkarposh of Purnea
Shaykh Kaku of Lahore (d. 1477)
Shaykh Husamuddin of Manikpur (d. 1477)
(6) Shaykh Jahid of Pandua (d. 1455)
Shaykh Shamsuddin of Ajmir (d. 1476)

**Note of the Table :** Chishiti tradition was upheld and conntinued thorough the family of Makhdum Shah Nur Qutb Alam in Bengal and North India. Example of a land-grant Sufi family in the Taifa stage : Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493 - 1519) dedicated 47 villages for the maintenance of the Langarkhana atteched to the dargah of S. Nur Qutb Aalm (Chhoti darhgah in Pandua) the income of which was six thousand rupees (sashhazari estate). In 1829 and 1841 enquiries were held in which it was proved that the estate was la-kharaj; the right of the grantees was renewed by Shah Shuja in 1648 to S. Sharafuddin whose grandson S. Kabir was the Sajjadahnashin at that time. This is a good example of shifting of personal illustriousness of an earlier Sufi (S. Nur Qutb Alam in this case) to his dargah and his descendants becoming a land-grant family in the Taifa Stage. (Simplified version of the detailed Family Tree given in Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua by Ali & Stapleton.)

## (ii) - Familial lineage - Shaykh Nur Qutb Alam

**(1) A. Ala ul Haq Panduani (d. 1384)**

- S. Muhammad Ali
- S. Muhammad Azam (Sultan Azam Sha's Wazir - 1410)
- (2) S. Ahmed/ Nur Qutbuddin Alam (d. 1418/19 (?)
  - (3) S. Rifatuddin / Afqah
    - (4) S. Jahid (10 sons; d. 1455)
      - S. Suf
      - (5) S. Ashraf
      - S. Ghaus
        - S. Sharif
        - S. Bahauddin
        - (6) S. Musharraf / Reza
        - (7) S. Shmad
        - (8) S. Mahmud
        - (9) S. Nizamuddin
        - (10) S. Sharafuddin (living in 1648- Sanad)
  - S. Ahmad (Shahid in 1418)
    - S. Ajmal
    - S. Aqmal

(alive in 1493, mentioned in Muzaffar Shahi inscription receipient of first land grant 'sanad')

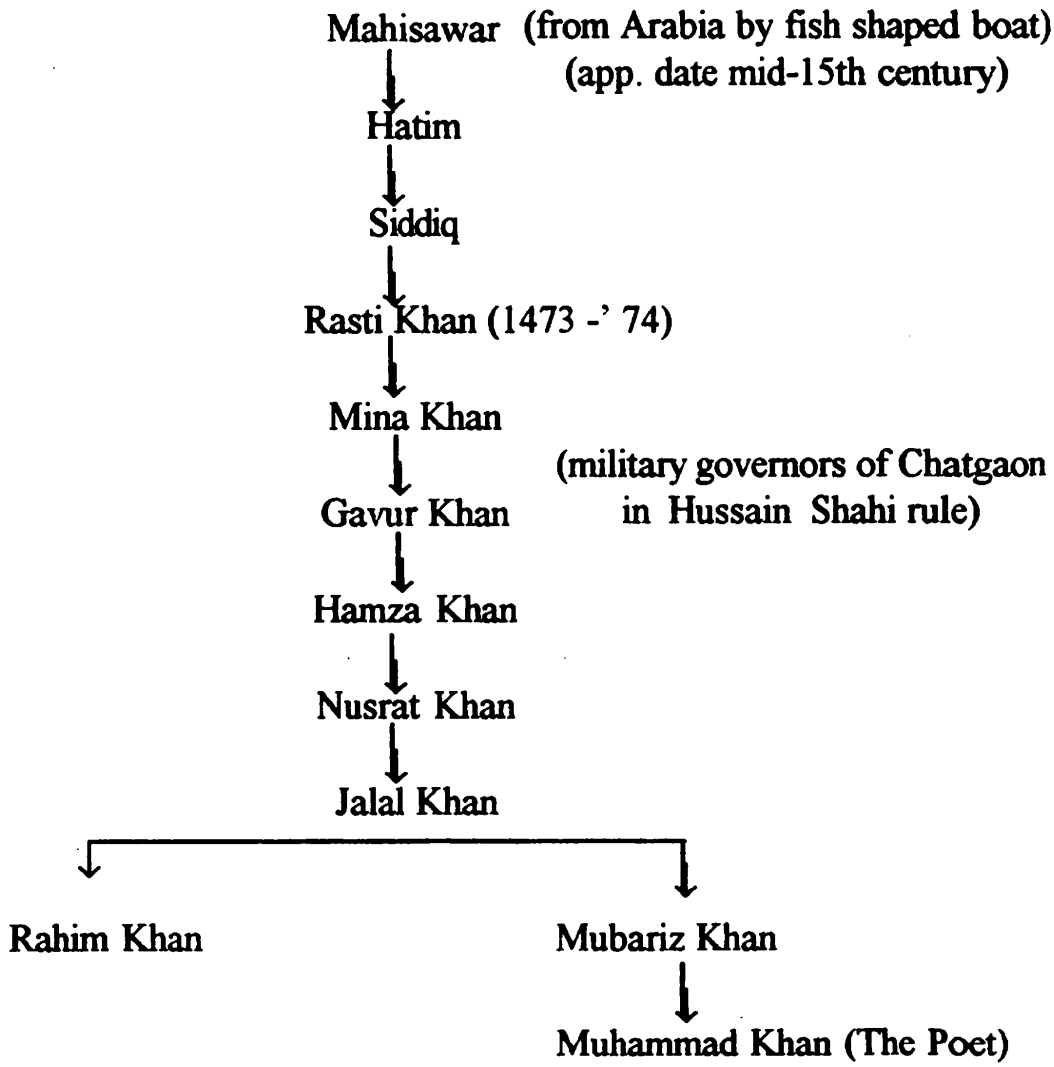
## IV . Hereditization of Designations in Kayastha families :

Note . Designations of administrative posts turned into surnames due to hereditization of professions in the Kayastha / other families. All the terms are available approximately between the 14th century to the 16th century.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Khan | = | Honorific title given by Turkish Government to important officers and zamindars. |
| Rai / Roy | = | Same as above / Hindu landlords of earlier period. |
| Mallik / Malik | = | Bengali form of Malik – 'Shakar Malik' / Saghir Malik – title and designation in Hussain Shahi period. |
| Mustaufi | = | Chief Accountant |
| Chowdhuri | = | Revenue Supervisor / Local Administrator / Zamindar; used mostly by brahman families, also by others |
| Adhikari | = | Writer / Kayastha / later Revenue Inspector / local administrator. |
| Qanungo | = | Expert on land law other functions. |
| Karkun | = | Record Keeper |
| Khastagir | = | From Darkhastgir – one who drafted and presented application at the Court. |
| Majumdar | = | Majmu' adar / Revenue Contractor |
| Shikdar | = | Revenue Officer-in-Charge of Shiq / revenue unit. (later addition) |
| Mahalanabish | = | Mahalnavis – same as above (Mughal period?) |
| Karfarma | = | Kar-i-Farman–in Charge of Royal Declarations. |
| Sharkhel | = | Sar-i-Khail– it became synonymous with manager of household affairs income of the conservative Hindu landed families - Tarafdar f n. (1) p. 343 < Suryadas 'Sarkhel' contemporary surname of a brahman - Vaishnav leader > |

## V. Family Tree of Rasti Khan

Example of mixed / converted Muslim family in the Nobility -- (from poet Muhammad Khan's Maqtul Hosayn – 17th Century)




Note : Founder of the family, one Mahisawar was married to a Brahmin girl. Rasti Khan was Deshpati / Military Governor of Chatgaon, mentioned in a Barbak Shahi Inscription, date 1473 - 1474. His son, Paragal Khan and grandson Chhuti Khan, both were military Governors / Sar-i-Laskar of Chatgaon under Hussain Shah and Nusrat Shah. A family of three generations of military governors, they may be taken as an example of converted or at least mixed family. (Sahitya Patrika, Winter no. 1369 B.S. p. 210-211)

## VI. Urban Constituents

**Provincial and Local Administrative terms with names of places:**

**Note** : Iqlim and arsah are the two major units in administrative divisions. Names of two iqlims - Muazzamabad and Mubarakbad, are found both in coins and inscriptions, used from the time of Sikandar Shah (second half of the 14th century) to Alauddin Hussain Shah (early 16th century). But Mubarakbad has been used only in one inscription of Nasiruddin Mahumad Shah I. Iqlim Muazzambabad spread from Sonargaon to the north-west including a part of Faridpur district, also a very large area. No-name of iqlim has been found in the western part of the Delta; but names of 'arsah', another kind of administrative unit, are available in the south-western part of the Delta : arsah Sajlamankhabad and arsah Hadigarh centered around Satgaon. Arsah Chatgaon and arsah Sylhat in eastern Bengal arsah Chawlistan in Assam and arsah Shahr-i-Nau (still unverified) have been mentioned in the sources. Arsah is generally accepted as a subdivision of iqlim. Dr. A. H. Dani is of opinion that administrative divisions in the western part of the Delta was known as arsah and in its eastern part it was termed as iqlim. Shahr = commercial city, qasbah = city without fort. Khitta = city with fort.

*Urban Constituents*

| Terms | Name | Remarks |
|---|---|---|
| Iqlim<br>Iqlim | Muazzamabad<br>Mubarakbad | from coins : A Karim - Corpus of the Muslim coins of Bengal, Dacca, 1960; from inscription : A. H. Dani - Bibliography of Muslim Inscrption of Bengal. |
| Arsah<br>"<br>"<br>" | Satgaon<br>Chatgaon<br>Shahr-i-Nau<br>Chawalistan urf Kamru | from coins |
| Arsah<br>"<br>" | Sajlamankhabad<br>Hadigarh<br>Sylhat | Repeatedly present in Hussainshahi inscriptions |
| Shahr<br><br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>" | Laobela<br>Shimlabad<br>Hadigarh<br>Hossainbad/Gaur (?)<br>Barbakabad<br>Firuzabad<br>Muzaffarabad<br>Mahmudabad /Gaur<br>Muhammadabad | in Sylhet district |
| Qasbah | Dacca Khas | |
| Thana | Laur | |
| Mulk | Chawalistan urf Kamru | in Sikandar Shahi coins (759 A. H.) |
| Diyar | | in the coins of the Ilyas Shahis |

*Divisions of the Hussain Shahi Bengal in the 'Ayn'*

| Division | Remarks |
|---|---|
| Barbakabad | South of Lakhnauti, part of present Rajshahi and Bogura districts. |
| Bazuha | part of present Rajshahi and Bogura area |
| Bakla | Faridpur - Bakharganj area. |
| Chatgaon | |
| Fathabad | Faridpur |
| Ghoraghat | On west side of Cochbehar, from the Tista to the Brahmputra, in present Rangpur district. |
| Hajipur | In north Bihar, extended by Ilyas Shah |
| Hussainabad | Lakhnauti/Gaur |
| Khalifatabad | Bagerhat, Khulna district |
| Kamru-Kamta | Chawalistan / |
| Lakhnauti | Gaur/capital in Maldah district |
| Muaazzmabad | Iqlim, Dacca district |
| Mandaran | West side of the Hooghly district |
| Monghyr | South Bihar |
| Purnea | part of north Bihar on the eastern side of the Kosi |
| Panjrah / Pinjrah | in Dinajpur district |
| Sonargaon | included in iqlim Mazzamabad, present Dacca district. |
| Suleimanabad | Burdwan area in Rahr/western part of the Delta. |
| Sylhat | |
| Sharifabad / Nagaur | Birbhum district. |
| Satgaon | Arsah Satgaon mentioned earliest in Muhammad bin Tughloq's coins. |
| Sajlamankhabad | Arsah |
| Tipperah | |
| Tanda | Area from Sikrigali to Rajmahal, part of Santhal Parganah and Murshidabad area, |
| Tajpur | North Bihar, east of Purnea. |

*Fort*

| Name | Location | Remarks |
|---|---|---|
| Bardhankote / Bishankote | situated in the north-east on the bank of the Tista | pre-Turkish conquest period fort; known to be a protected place in the time of Bakhtiyar Khalji, Minhaj, Nizamuddin, Badauni and Ghulam Hussain Salim differ about the name of the river on which it was situated; Bagmati/Begbati in Abul Fazl - same as the Tista; at present Bardhankote is in Bogura district identified with Mahasthan garh / ancient Pundradhan, only nearby river the Karatoya. |
| Devkote | 75 miles north-east of Lakhnauti connected with Lakhnaur on the south-west by a 150 miles long road | pre-Turkish conquest period fort;military capital of Bakhtiyar Khaliji. |
| Garh Mandaran / Umardan (in Minhaj)- included in Sajlamankhabad | Western side of the present Hooghly district. | pre-Turkish conquest fort; bone of contention between Orissa rulers and Bengal rulers; first time conquered by Mughi-suddin Yuzbak in 1254; |

*Fort*

| Name | Location | Remarks |
|---|---|---|
| Garh Mandaran | | regional headquarter of Orissa rulers till 14th century. |
| Tughrilgarh/Narqillah | 25 miles distance from present Dacca, on the eastern side of the Padma; | Built by Mughisuddin Tughril (1268-1281); later Larikal of the Feringhis. |
| Ekdala fort | in present Dinajpur district adjacent to Bairhatta, a mouza called Ekdala; it was situated 23 miles north of Gaur (Stapleton and Westmacott) | First battle (1354) and second battle (1359) of Ekdala were fought between Ilyas Shah, Sikandar Shah and Firuz Shah Tughloq; the fort was rebuilt and extended by Ilyas Shah due to its strategic position; first time capital under him. Road link with Devkote, Pandua and Gaur by Alauddin Hussain Shah. |
| Gaur Fort | situated on the banks of the old Ganges, north-south, 30ft high, 190 ft wide wall, surrounded by a ditch of 200 ft. Cunnigham's Report Vol XV, p.50 | Built by Nasiruddin I (mid 15th C). Sultan's palace on southside -chand darwaza main gate - added by Barbak Shah, Hussain Shah and Nusrat Shah. |

*Mint*

| Mint | District | Earliest date of site 1204 - 1342 |
|---|---|---|
| Dar us Zarb Lakhnauti/ Gaur | Maldah | 1236 |
| Bang | Eastern Bengal (location uncertain) | 1302 |
| Sonargaon | Dacca | 1305 |
| Ghyaspur | Mymensingh | 1322 |
| Satgaon | Howrah | 1328 |
| Pandua / Firuzabad | Maldah | 1341, 1342-1433 |
| Kamru | on the eastern side of the Karotoya (location uncertain) | 1357 |
| Muazzambad | Dacca | 1358 |
| Chatgaon | Chattagram | 1415 |
| Fatehabad | Faridpur | 1418 |
| Rotspur / Rohtas | Shahabad | 1423 |
| Muhammadabad | Jessore | 1433-1538 |
| Mandaran | Hooghly | 1481–'86 |
| Chandpur | Comilla | 1483 |
| Khalifatabad | Khulna | 1493 - 1519 |
| Bagerhat | Khulna | – |
| Nusratabad Ghoraghat | Dinajpur | 1516 |
| Barbakabad | Rajshahi | 1518 |
| Arkan | Arakan | |

*Coins of Hussain Shahi Dynasty*

| Sultans | Maximum weight | Date | Name of Mint |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alauddin Hussain Shah | 167 grs | 899 AH | Dar us Zarb = (Gaur) |
| Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah | 165 grs | 925 AH | Hussainabad and Fatahbad |
| Alauddin Firuz Shah | 164 grs | 939 AH | Hussainabad |
| Ghyasuddin Mahumud Shah | 170 grs | 945 AH | Hussainabad |

*Mosque*

| Mosque | District | Date | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *Maldah* | | |
| Dargah of Skh. Nur Qutb Alam | Pandua | 1442-59 | Nasiruddin Mahmud I |
| Kadam Rasul | Pandua | 1530 | Narisuddin Nusrat Shah |
| Chamkati mosque | Gaur | 1475 | Yusuf Shah |
| Lattan mosque | Gaur | 1475 | Yusuf Shah |
| Tantipara mosque | Gaur | 1480 | Jalaluddin Fatah Shah |
| Gunabanta mosque | Gaur | 1484 | |
| Barosona mosque | Gaur | 1527 | Started by Alauddin Hussain Shah and completed by Nusrat Shah |
| Akhi Sirajuddin mosque | Gaur | 1510 | Yusuf Shah |
| Darasbari mosque with madrasah | Khulna - | 1479 | Dargah of Pir Khan Jahan Ali |
| Shath gumbaz mosque | Chatgaon - | 1459 | Fakruddin Mubarak Shah (mention in Batuta -1346) |
| Mubarak Shahi mosque | Chatgaon - | 1346 | |
| Dargah of Byazid Bostami | Chatgaon- | | |
| Panchpirer dargah mosque | Dacca Sonargaon | 1410 | Ghyasuddin Azam Shah |
| Baba Adam Shahid mosque | Rampal | 1483 | |

*Mosque*

| Mosque | District | Date | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|
| Binatbibi mosque | Dacca / Sonargaon | 1456-'57 | |
| Damdama mosque | Dinajpur / Gangarampur | 13th century | Legend : built by Bakhtiyar Khalji for soldiers, remnant of a fort. |
| Dinajpur mosque | Gopalganj | 1460 | |
| Bajra mosque | Noakhali / Bhulua | end of the 14th century | |
| Baro Auliya mosque | Pabna / Shahazadpur | no dt? | |
| Baba Farid mosque | Faridpur | in the name of Shaykh Farid, patron saint of Yusuf Shah | |
| Masjidbari | Bakharganj/ Patuakhali | 1465 | |
| Gharib Shah - Baram Shah dargah | Jessore/near Jessore town | early 15th century | |
| Baro-Khan Ghazi | Barobazar | app. 14th century | |
| Shahi mosque | Rajshahi | 1459-1473 | Ruknuddin Barbak Shah |
| Ismail Ghazi mosque | Kantaduar | 1519-'32 | Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah |

*Mosque*

| Mosque | District | Date | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pir Shah Jalal mosque | Sylhet | 1339-5- | Fakruddin Mubarak Shah identified by Batuta <1346> |
| Rajnagar mosque | Birbhum/ Rajnagar | no date | Very early |
| Pir Turkan Ali mosque | Murshidabad/ -Rangamati | no date | Very old |
| Ghaisabad dargah | Azimganj | no date | in ruins |
| Murtaza mosque | Jangipur | 1298/1529 | Pre-Mughal |
| Zafar Khan Ghazi mosque | Hooghly/ Tribeni Satgaon | 1476-'83 | |
| Baishdarwaza mosque | Chhoto Pandua Hooghly | 1414 | Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah |
| Shah Ismail Ghazi dargah | Mandaran | | Rukunddin Barbak Shah. |
| Adina mosque | Maldah- Maldah | | in the region of Sikandar Shah |
| Eklakhi mosque | Pandua - Maldah | 1418 | Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah Ganeshi |

| Armed Assistance from Muslim Govt. | Followers-Mercenaries – disciples | Colonisation and Conversion |
|---|---|---|
| – | 5/7 thousand followers | Colonization |
| – | with followers | Converasion |
| – | Large number of followers | Conversion, built mosque |
| Millitary assistance from a Delhi Sultan | Disciples - 18 Auliyas | Islam preached |
| – | with follower | Islam preached |
| Shamsuddin Firuz Shah's army sent | Large number of soldiers | Large Scale conversion |
| Helped Shah Safi as general of Shamsuddin Firuz Shah | Fought with soldiers | Conversion of Man Raja with subjects. |
| Halped by Shamsuddin Firuz Shah's general Sikandar Ghazi | 313 followers/ soldiers joined | Large scale conversion |
| Helped Nasiruddin Mahumd to conquer S.E. Bengal | 60 thousand soldiers followers 360 sappers the Khanjalis | Reclamation of forest area - Islam preached colonization |
| General of Rukuddin Barbak Shah | Large group of followers | Conversion of king of Kamrup |

l in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century.

## Abbreviations

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| C.S. | = | Current Studies |
| S.A. | = | Sahitya Akademi, Delhi |
| B.A. | = | Bangla Akademi, Dacca |
| I.A. | = | Islamic Culture |
| E.I. | = | Epigraphia Indica |
| B.P.P. | = | Bengal, Past and Present |
| J.R.I. | = | Jaysawal Research Institude |
| E.I.M. | = | Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica |
| B.S.P. | = | Bangiya Sahitya Parishat |
| C.U.P. | = | Calcutta University Press |
| O.U.P. | = | Oxford University Press |
| V.B.A. | = | Visva Bharati Annals |
| A.S.B. | = | Asiatic Society of Bengal |
| A.S.P. | = | Asiatic Society of Pakistan |
| I.H.R. | = | Indian History Review |
| P.I.H.C. | = | Proceedings of Indian History Congress |
| P.H.C. | = | Proceedings of Pakistan History Congress |
| J.A.S.B. | = | Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal |
| J.N.S.I. | = | Journal of the Numismatic Society of India |
| J.V.R.M. | = | Journal of the Varendra Research Museum |
| J.P.H.S. | = | Journal of the Pakistan History Society |
| J.A.S.P. | = | Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan |
| C.A.S.H. | = | Centre for Advanced Studies in History, Aligarh |
| J.O.A.S. | = | Journal of Oriental and African Studies |
| P.B.H.S. | = | Proceeding of the Bangladesh History Society |
| J.A.S.B. | = | Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh |
| B.S.P.P. | = | Bangiya Sahitya Parishat Patrika |
| J.I.S.O.A. | = | Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art |
| J.E.S.H.O. | = | Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient |
| J.E.S.H.R. | = | Indian Economic and Social History Review |
| K.B.K.O.P.L. | = | Khuda Buksh Khan Oriental Public Library |

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Born in Calcutta in a family of academics and educationists, she was educated in Calcutta University and later at Harvard University, Cambridge, U.S.A. She was awarded fellowship from Middle Eastern Studies Centre at Harvard, Fulbright Travel Grant and U.G.C. Scholarship for research in medieval history. She completed Ph.D. from the Department of Islamic History and Culture, Calcutta University and taught for almost thirty years in under-graduate colleges in Calcutta. She has published a number of articles on socio-economic conditions that prevailed in medieval Bengal. She has widely travelled in Europe, America, Canada, Egypt, China and in South-East Asian countries. At present she is the Secretary, Asutosh Mookerjee Memorial Institute, Calcutta and Member, Board of Advisors and Kendriya Committee of Eastern India, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

The commemorative silver coin of Sultan Jalal al-Din Muhammad, struck in 1421, is printed on the cover.